

# “We’re the Girls With the Bad Reputations”: The Rhetoric of Riot Grrrl

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## ABSTRACT

### “WE’RE THE GIRLS WITH THE BAD REPUTATIONS”: THE RHETORIC OF RIOT GRRRL

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Throughout the 1980s, President Reagan’s administration waged an undeclared war on feminism by defeating the Equal Rights Amendment and employing both the Department of Education and U.S. Supreme Court as weapons against working and single mothers. Despite the right wing’s successes, feminism survived through radical artists such as Karen Finley and Barbara Kruger. The 1980s were also a decade plagued by youth alienation as MTV entered cultural consciousness and materialistic adolescents immersed in popular culture were distanced from their former hippie parents. On the other end of the spectrum, adolescents that self-identified as outcasts moved further into alternative scenes and raged against oppressive Reagan politics with “hardcore” punk. A scene that has historically championed the underdog and resisted sexism grew aggressive and unwelcoming to many women, inspiring them to create their own safe spaces.

Riot Grrrl is an influential and radical feminist movement that began circa 1991 in response to women’s oppression by Reagan politics and absence in the masculine punk scene. Riot Grrrl-associated bands, including Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, and prominent grrrls such as Kathleen Hanna appealed to their young female audience’s needs and emotions with the purpose of persuading them to create their own texts (namely music and zines). Throughout the early 1990s, the mainstream media misrepresented and

condescended Riot Grrrl as it saw the young feminist movement as both a threat and potential source of economic gain. Despite the negative portrayals, riot grrrls sought the creation of a positive feminist mythology. Grrrls urged each other to define Riot Grrrl for themselves, to “write the body” in the words of Hélène Cixous. Riot Grrrl adopted punk’s “Do It Yourself” ethos to utilize the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida and become an empowering and heteroglossic movement with the goal of deconstructing patriarchal society.

## INTRODUCTION

To say that the 1980s was a restrictive decade for women is an understatement. Under Reagan in the year 1983 alone, the Department of Education published both the educational reform report *A Nation at Risk* and a survey that claimed the children of stay at home mothers perform better on standardized tests (Bondi 173). Essentially, Reagan's administration urged women to stay at home in their traditional mother-wife roles *for the sake of the children*. The fact that one department published both of these documents in the same year implies women's rights and careers were damaging not only their children's educations, but the nation as a whole. Too many women worked out of the house, which caused so many children to fall behind in school that it put the entire nation's education system "at risk."

Additionally, that same year an unmarried woman was fired from her job as a public school teacher when she gave birth. When the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, the justices ruled, "she was fired for failure to give notice, not *merely* (italics mine) for immorality" (Bondi 174). This sentiment continued over the next decade. On May 18, 1992, the popular career-woman television character Murphy Brown gave birth to a baby boy and, since the biological father refused involvement, decided to raise the child on her own (English). The very next day Republican Vice President Dan Quayle made a speech in California in which he stated, "It doesn't help matters when primetime TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice" (Quayle). Less than one decade after the

U.S. Supreme Court ruled on single motherhood's immorality, women were still demonized for having careers and lives separate from men.

After defeating the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)—what was supposed to be the great pride of second wave feminism—in 1982, Reagan's administration used the Department of Education and the Supreme Court to assure the public that feminism (the threat, that dirty f-word) was dead and that it was time to get the nation back on the right track.

And yet feminism did not disappear; instead, it evolved. The feminist artists throughout these years were highly controversial, rebelling strongly and loudly against the culture and President Reagan in particular. One image by Barbara Kruger in 1982, for example, features “a woman subdued by giant needles embedded in her spine and legs; the text reads[,] ‘We have received orders not to move’” (Bondi 56). Kruger's piece seems to be a comment on the defeat of the ERA, the message from the Reagan administration that women are “not to move” from their traditional roles. Also during the 1980s, performance artist Karen Finley addressed “the abuse and oppression of women, racial minorities, gays, AIDS victims, and the homeless” as she “screamed, howled, and ranted,” while a group of stealth art activists called the Guerrilla Girls “[sought] to transform anger into fun” (Bondi 57-58).

Furthermore, the 1980s was a decade especially plagued by youth alienation. As MTV gained its ground, materialistic adolescents immersed in popular culture were distanced from their former hippie parents. On the other end of the spectrum, adolescents that self-identified as outcasts moved further into alternative scenes and, “after the election of Ronald Regan in 1980, political hardcore was born” (Bondi 107). Out of



Washington, D.C. came Discord, an independent record label run by Ian MacKaye whose band Minor Threat joined forces with the band Dead Kennedys to organize 1983's Rock Against Reagan campaign (Bondi 107-108). It is telling that throughout the Reagan administration the nation's capitol became a haven for punk rock musicians and activists. It is this culture of oppression and the artistic cultivation of frustration that birthed third wave feminism, and out of this group of young women coming of age during the Reagan era came the riot grrrls.

In 1989, "*Time* ... published its article about how most women ... [didn't] consider themselves feminists. ... [T]he world at large thought it [feminism] was dead: The term *post-feminist* was already making the rounds" (Marcus 40). Third wave feminism's birth occurred somewhere within the first few years of the 1990s—that is, the third wave and Riot Grrrl began at approximately the same time. Most sources that provide pseudo-histories of third wave feminism claim it began in 1992 with Rebecca Walker's *Ms. Magazine* article, "Becoming the Third Wave." It is of course possible that it existed before this publication—"we rarely know when a social movement begins or ends, only that it has evolved" (Stewart, Smith, and Denton 30)—but this essay was the first widely distributed piece in which the new generation of feminists was named. Written in response to Clarence Thomas' sexual harassment victory over Anita Hill, Walker's essay functions as "a public declaration or proclamation"—a manifesto.

Published later that same year was a *Newsweek* article by Farai Chideya and Melissa Rossi titled, "Revolution, Girl Style," written about Riot Grrrl. In it a manifesto composed by Kathleen Hanna, who is a member of the Riot Grrrl-associated band Bikini Kill and is often regarded as the leader of the movement, is (slightly mis-)quoted: "We

are mad [angry] at a society that tells us that Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak” (Chideya and Rossi). The manifesto was most likely Hanna’s response to both Riot Grrrl’s growing presence in and misrepresentation by the mainstream media and blows to feminism such as the verdict of the Clarence Thomas trial.

Other attacks on feminism under Presidents Reagan and Bush include a major U.S. Supreme Court case and attempt to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 case that legalized abortion. The 1992 case of *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* first began with two particular events in 1989. First, Pennsylvania’s Governor Robert P. Casey passed the Abortion Control Act, “and five of its provisions were immediately challenged in court by Planned Parenthood of Southeast PA” (“Abortion Access”), resulting in the aforementioned 1992 court case. Second, “the Supreme [Court] ... signal[ed] in the *Webster [v. Reproductive Health Decisions]* decision of July 1989 that five justices were now prepared to scrap *Roe v. Wade*,” which “intensified when two of the justices who had dissented in *Webster*, William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall, left the Court, to be replaced by Bush appointees David Souter and Clarence Thomas” (Goldstein 96). The court during Reagan’s presidency was already prepared to rewrite abortion history and President Bush only strengthened the possibility.

Despite the number of right wing appointed justices on the Supreme Court, some members of the public remained skeptical that *Roe* could be overturned, particularly since the 1973 decision’s author, Justice Harry A. Blackmun, remained in the court. In *Contemporary Cases in Women’s Rights*, Leslie Friedman Goldstein explains how “[t]he *Casey* decision did not even necessitate a reconsideration of *Roe*; it involved a variety of abortion regulations but no sweeping prohibitions. But once again the executive branch

requested that *Roe* be overruled, and ... the Supreme Court decided to respond (albeit negatively) to that request” (97). The issue in *Casey* was not, on the surface, whether abortion should be banned entirely (either nationally or solely in the state of Pennsylvania), but rather “the constitutionality of ... [the] regulations adopted by the state of Pennsylvania” under Governor Casey (Goldstein 98). However, despite the claim originally presented by Planned Parenthood to the US District Court, *Casey* became a case on the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* once it entered a Supreme Court where the majority of the justices were prepared to revoke abortion rights altogether.

In 1992, both Hanna and Walker were attempting to breathe life into a movement they viewed as necessary, as imminent, and they were not alone. Susan Faludi’s late 1991 feminist text *Backlash* both responds to and exposes the restrictive culture of the 1980s. One feminist scholar, Ednie Kaeh Garrison, explains the significance of this text:

Faludi’s book is especially notable for popularizing a rhetorical analysis ... to examine the ways in which the women’s movement and feminism have been demonized by popular commercial media, and the effect this demonization has had on feminist consciousness, movement, and effectiveness in transforming social institutions and ideology. (qtd. in Belzer 26-27)

Not only did this text direct the blame for feminism’s seeming disappearance to the patriarchal media, but it provided feminists with a tool, a weapon—a way to combat the mainstream media’s influence and revive the movement. For the broader feminist movement, *Backlash* also functioned very much like Hanna’s and Walker’s texts—that is, a manifesto.

Riot Grrrl originated as the title of a political, feminist zine that, much like a manifesto, was a call to action for women to work together and resist patriarchy. The term developed out of Jen Smith's suggestion of a "girl riot" in response to the Mount Pleasant race riots of 1991<sup>1</sup> and "the growling 'grrrl' spelling that Tobi [Vail] had recently made up as a jokey variation on all the tortured spellings of 'womyn/womon/wimmin' feminists liked to experiment with" (Marcus 80-1). Published and distributed by Smith and members of the bands Bikini Kill and Bratmobile in July of 1991 in Washington, DC, the zine's circulation and later issues inspired so-called chapters to open across the country and eventually the globe. These Riot Grrrl groups typically functioned individually and held meetings that served as safe spaces for women to discuss issues such as sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, and abuse, but a handful of times throughout the 1990s the individual grrrls came together for conventions, the first of which was attended by over one hundred young feminists. In addition to community and validation, the Riot Grrrl conventions offered grrrls music concerts, music lessons, and zine workshops.

Overall, zines played a crucial role in the development of the Riot Grrrl movement. In particular, a zine titled *Jigsaw* written by Bikini Kill's drummer Tobi Vail was especially influential. Vail's rants about the "lack of women in music who called themselves feminists" inspired her future Bikini Kill bandmates Kathleen Hanna and Kathi Wilcox, who later contacted her about starting their own feminist punk band

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<sup>1</sup> Following "the police shooting of a Salvadoran immigrant[,] ... Latino youths clashed with police on the streets of Mount Pleasant, Adams Morgan and Columbia Heights over three nights in May 1991. More than 30 businesses were damaged, cars were burned and at least 160 people were arrested" (Jouvenal).

(Meltzer 11). While Vail was educated in feminism through her experiences and self-motivated studies, Kathleen Hanna had recently attended college women's studies courses and fought her school administration over issues of art and censorship. On the period of time just prior to Riot Grrrl's creation, Hanna says:

I was fresh out of school and filled with the postmodern, deconstructive theories that would later inform my art and fuel my critique of mainstream culture. Recent volunteer work at a rape crisis/domestic violence shelter had prepared me for the outpouring of emotion many women would present to me after the many punk shows I played, but, unfortunately "feminist history" was still just a footnote to a footnote to a footnote in my mind, accompanied by a scratchy picture of a suffragette holding an illegible sign. ... I started calling myself a feminist in 1989. ("Kathleen [Hanna]")

It is appropriate that Vail and Hanna both came to Riot Grrrl through absence and contradiction—Vail's desire to fill a void and Hanna's self-identification as a feminist just when the media declared the "postfeminist" age—considering both the movement and the female experience are composed of both.

Members of Riot Grrrl-associated bands Bikini Kill, Heavens to Betsy, and Excuse 17 attended Evergreen State College, which is a school without either grades or majors in Olympia, Washington. Also with roots in a school in the Pacific Northwest, Bratmobile formed after Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe met at the University of Oregon. The grrrls' friendships with male musicians and independent record producers led them to the activist scene in Washington, DC where the first Riot Grrrl convention, the publication of that first Riot Grrrl zine, and a feminist punk movement emerged. The

two cities were viewed as opposites in the punk movement: feminine Olympia versus masculine DC.

Despite Olympia's pro-feminist scene, punk has historically been male-dominated. While many punk bands in the 1970s had female members (O'Hara 84), they were more often than not "bass players, not lead guitarists or lead singers, which forced them into the background behind charismatic male performers" (Oakes 125). The punk scene of the 1980s—with the arrival of MTV, political hardcore, and Reagan politics—continued this trend and more. Indie scholar Kaya Oakes explains:

Women did do important work behind the scenes in indie, running clubs, music labels, and mail-order services, writing for zines, and publishing books, but within the realm of music they still assumed primarily supportive roles. The violence that had become commonplace at punk shows in the eighties may be partly to blame for this. (Oakes 125)

Male punk rockers embraced their masculinity in the 1980s hardcore scene and introduced aggressive vocals and dancing ("moshing"). Riot Grrrl grew out of frustration with this particular punk scene as well as the patriarchal society nursing it. Grrrls responded by forming their own bands and safe spaces for female punk rockers.

The Riot Grrrl *social* movement arguably began in 1991 with the aforementioned band formations and zine publication, but if that is the case, how many individual revolutions qualify as a social movement? If the Riot Grrrl movement came into existence with the very first "revolution within," then how and when it really began will never be known. Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, household computers and internet access became more widely available and, although the movement was

pronounced dead circa 1995, many Riot Grrrls looked to the internet for means of production and community, making the exact “where” and “when” of the movement even more difficult to identify.

Over the last two decades, several have attempted to write the “definitive history” of Riot Grrrl. In her review of Sara Marcus’ recently released book, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of Riot Grrrl*, Hanna claims that she “usually [doesn’t] get behind projects like this cuz [sic] they are typically really bad” (Hanna, “Great New Book”). True, attempted Riot Grrrl definitive histories are full of misinformation, but when the subject is a movement that forcefully resists definition and each individual participant is encouraged to make her own meaning, then who is to blame? Still, Marcus’ thorough research and careful contextualization gets the movement mostly right. One of the only pseudo-negative reviews of *Girls to the Front* comes from another original Riot Grrrl: “While minor mistakes and mixups populate the text to a certain extent”—including the portrayal of Bratmobile as less serious and influential than Bikini Kill and Heavens to Betsy, and the presentation of Allison Wolfe propelling a used tampon into the audience at a Fugazi show as a “(partial) lie”—“*Girls to the Front* seems far more accurate than any other thirdparty [sic] Riot Grrrl documentation out there” (Wolfe).

Nadine Monem’s *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!* is one such flawed “definitive history,” although it does not necessarily claim to be such, nor even that such a thing is possible. What it does claim, however, is to be a text with the purpose of “stand[ing] in opposition to the media representations that poisoned riot grrrl in so many ways all those years ago” (7). The problem with this book is that it does not even live up to its own standard. Monem’s book is filled with small mistakes, from incorrectly named

zines to misspelled artists' names, in addition to the typing errors that should have been caught by thorough proofreading. Furthermore, the text was published in London and has a slant towards the Riot Grrrl movement in the UK, which was much different in music and ideology than that of the U.S., and the information and research in the book are not original—rather than conducting their own interviews, Monem et al. quoted others' and used their own writing as examples of zines.

Similarly, Cherie Turner's *Everything You Need to Know about The Riot Grrrl Movement: The Feminism of a New Generation* lacks originality in information and perspective. What is interesting about this book, however, is the fact that it is fifty-five pages long, written in large font (eighteen point, approximately), and aimed at adolescent readers. The book includes minor mistakes, but the biggest complaint against it is actually the fact that it is so short and simply written and yet claims to be “everything you need to know.” While it is especially false in this case, a brief look at the back cover's list of other “need to know” titles is especially disturbing: AIDS, date rape, incest, looking and feeling your best, racism, and sexual abuse—just to name a few. The very idea that any of these topics could be covered entirely in a text, much less one as brief as this one, opposes and is offensive to the Riot Grrrl movement itself.

What sets Marcus' *Girls to the Front* apart from these other texts is not only the fact that it was thoroughly researched for at least five years with the help of many of Riot Grrrl's original grrrls and artists, but also that it is composed as a narrative. For many sociologists, and social movement theorists specifically, the role of narrative in the formation of revolutions is incredible. In *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance: The Power of Story*, Eric Selbin explains that over the past few centuries, “story and story-telling have



been enjoying a renaissance of sorts, perhaps spurred by new technologies that simultaneously allow more people to tell stories than ever before and address the ancient human need for connection, to each other and to ourselves” (4). The new technologies make it easier for stories to be composed and accessed, and these stories, in which people respond to the society around them, help create social movements where people unite under a common cause. Although the texts produced within Riot Grrrl—namely the zines and song lyrics—may be viewed as narratives themselves responsible for the dispersion and growth of the movement, Marcus’ book feels very much like a nostalgic attempt to revive Riot Grrrl while simultaneously rewriting (or unwriting) its history.

This thesis is divided into three chapters to not only apply the work of theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Hélène Cixous to the Riot Grrrl movement, but to also examine the ways the movement has been defined by the mainstream over the past two decades as well as the grrrls’ definitions of themselves and their movement. Despite the efforts of periodicals such as the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* to misrepresent and condescend, riot grrrls fought back, armed each other with weapons of rhetorical analysis and zine production, and continued to spread the movement. Through their opposition to the mainstream media, Riot Grrrl grew into a massive zine network wherein grrrls wrote their bodies and individual manifestos, creating the movement’s mosaic meaning. Although Riot Grrrl arguably exists today as an evolved form of the original movement (an idea that is discussed further in the conclusion), it is commonly accepted that Riot Grrrl took place during the first half of the 1990s and it is on this time period that this thesis focuses.

It must be said that, out of respect for the movement and the grrrls (past and present), this thesis—particularly its final chapter—does not seek to place a definition on Riot Grrrl. The nature of rhetoric involves the use of language that divides and categorizes as it creates meaning. As Kenneth Burke's theories explain, naming simultaneously tells what something is and is not. Definition is unavoidable on some level, but it is not my purpose. Instead, the goal is to explore the movement's complexity through its various definitions, its rhetoric. Ideally this thesis places the movement within a theoretical context in which the grrrls' meanings, purposes, and actions may be better understood for both future scholarship and movements.

## CHAPTER ONE

## “TURNING CURSIVE LETTERS INTO KNIVES”: COMPOSING RIOT GRRRL

In the early 1990s, feminist punk rockers united against patriarchy, both in society and the punk scene, and produced their own texts—zines and song lyrics—to reach out to each other and build a community. The Riot Grrrl movement is composed simultaneously of the reading and writing of these texts—that is, it came into being through production and reception.

A given of revolutions is that, in order for them to occur, something or someone is first opposed by another. Being upset about something in your life does not necessarily make you a part of a revolution, however, because in order for one to take place, “people need to feel both aggrieved about some aspect of their lives and optimistic that, acting collectively, they can redress the problem” (qtd. in Polletta 140). If they do not believe the problem can or will be fixed, then they do not act, and therefore a revolution requires *both* aggravation and optimism, despair and hope. Jacques Derrida theorizes that both one thing and its opposite exist simultaneously within the text, and its “deconstruction” involves (in incredibly simplistic terms) unveiling these binaries in order to destabilize the center (“Signature Event Context”). Removing Derrida’s theory from the text and applying it to culture, the Riot Grrrl revolution sought to “deconstruct” patriarchy through pairing anger and girl-love and in many ways “deconstructed” itself: it is composed of dissonance and exists within blank space.

When Riot Grrrl entered the world, feminism was taking a beating. During the mid-twentieth century, the Republican Party was a strong proponent of second wave

feminism's Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), but the amendment disappeared and that relationship hardened in the 1980s under the Republican President Ronald Reagan. Simultaneously, the punk scene, which typically championed the underdog, made a move towards the male-dominated, violent "hardcore" style. After coming of age in a scene mirroring the patriarchy of society and the Reagan administration, soon-to-be-grrrls were then faced with President H.W. Bush's firm stance in favor of *Roe v. Wade*'s reversal. In Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory of identification, common ground is found between two different individuals until they identify with each other to a point he calls consubstantiation, meaning that they exist of the same substance ("A Rhetoric of Motives"). The feminist second wave was deemed a failure, women's rights were under attack, and the consubstantiation that previously existed—between women and the Republican Party, between feminists of different generations—was destroyed. Riot Grrrl, which is commonly accepted to have taken place in the first half of the 1990s, was thus composed of dissonance and absence in gender and politics.

The movement's formation began with the "foremothers" of Riot Grrrl's resistance to the patriarchal "hardcore" style and aesthetic that became predominant in the 1980s punk scene. They founded all-female bands, performed their anger through screaming vocals and dissonant guitar riffs, and used "shock value" tactics (such as the removal of clothing to reveal "slut" or "incest" written on their bodies) intended to make male audience members uncomfortable and female audience members inspired. Occasionally these bands also excluded males the way they felt excluded by the punk scene by not allowing men directly in front of the stage (typically where "mosh pits" form) or inside the venue at all. Despite the associations with punk rock, it is important to

note that not all riot grrrls identified as punk, nor were they all members of bands or producers of zines, but they were mainly white, female, and middle class. Although they were largely outnumbered by women, men who associated themselves with the revolution tended to be non-normative—that is, non-heterosexual, non-white, and/or lower class—as the main qualification for participation in Riot Grrrl may be summed up in a lyric from Bikini Kill’s song, “White Boy”: “I’m so sorry if I’m alienating some of you. Your fucking culture alienates me” (Hanna et al.). The Riot Grrrl movement—“Revolution girl-style now!” they demanded—may have existed solely for women, but the grrrls hoped to inspire revolutions for all who felt their voices were restricted by society.

The success of the Riot Grrrl revolution relied, in part, on the elevated positions of the band members. Without female producers taking control of their lives and careers publicly, the individual revolutions on which Riot Grrrl was built would not have existed. Social movement scholars, such as Francesca Polletta, explain that revolutions require a combination of “a *diagnosis* of the special condition in need of remedy, a *prognosis* for how to do that, and a *rationale* for action [which] ... identifies injustice, identity, and agency” (139). For riot grrrls, the punk scene’s mirroring of patriarchal society—which silenced women and turned the other cheek to issues plaguing women such as sexism, rape, and abuse—necessitated action, particularly the empowerment of women in order to destabilize the center. Throughout the movement’s few years of existence (and, arguably, continuing today with a new generation and new tactics), empowerment took place one young woman at a time.

In response to the 1960s sit-ins, Anthony Oberschall developed the “diffusion model” to “describ[e] mechanisms of recruitment in ‘loose structures’ ... where there is no prior overarching organization, ideology, or dependable flow of resources” (Polletta 143). Despite the fact that Riot Grrrl was so closely associated with the punk genre, many riot grrrls did not identify themselves as punk. The movement was certainly influenced by the DIY ethos of punk, and the foremothers adapted second wave feminist tactics to suit their needs and situations, but Riot Grrrl, lacking organization and unified meaning as previously explained, qualifies as a “loose structure.” Polletta explains, “in these circumstances, actors tend to overestimate the likelihood of repression and underestimate the possibility for success” (143). The blank space in which Riot Grrrl existed—dispersed throughout the United States (and eventually the globe) without a unified meaning, and as removed as possible from the media/mainstream—made their impact look small from the inside.

In December of 2009, Kathleen Hanna began a blog devoted to riot grrrls’ discovery of, and experiences within, the movement specifically because the majority of what the foremothers witnessed was negative and violent. According to Oberschall’s model, however, the success of such a “loose structure” is partially due to the media, from which the riot grrrls worked so hard to distance themselves: “When widely diffused, for example via media coverage, such perceptions cause people to revise their calculations of success and to participate” (Polletta 143). Articles in magazines such as *Sassy* and *Spin* (with mainly female and “indie” male audiences, respectively) are the most often cited media avenues of discovery for riot grrrls, but the movement was also recognized in *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The*

*Chicago Reader*, and *Seventeen*. Despite the fact that major media outlets often misrepresented and degraded the grrrls, creating a negative Riot Grrrl “myth” wherein the grrrls are merely adolescent rebels with a particular fashion sense, their presence in the media awakened individuals to their existence and allowed them to then seek out those essential texts, the zines and lyrics.

According to Selbin, “people rely—consciously or not—on a complex combination of myth, memory, and mimesis which they use to tell stories” (49), the last of which brings to mind Burke’s theory of identification, or consubstantiation (“A Rhetoric of Motives”). This theory outlines the ways in which certain individuals, such as the members of Riot Grrrl bands, influence others, or more specifically their audiences. Burke’s sources of identification include material, idealistic, and formal, wherein the audience identifies with the performer through, respectively, clothing, values, and quality of performance. These sources are not far from Aristotle’s three modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos. On the birth of revolutions, Selbin describes what is called the “demonstration effect,” which coincides nicely with Burke’s theory of identification: “in one place or more, people who perceive themselves oppressed learn of others who they can identify with who have sought to change the material and ideological conditions of their everyday lives; duly inspired, they too seek to make such fundamental and transformational changes” (71). It may be a bit simplified, but where these ideas of mimesis, the “demonstration effect,” and identification converged and began for riot grrrls was the point at which the texts (lyrics and zines—grrrls’ narratives, if you will) were read. One grrrl explains her reaction to discovering the movement as follows: “I thought, ‘Oh, there’s all these people out there.’ I really identified with what they went

through. I really wanted to be part of it, and I started my zine" (qtd. in Rosenberg and Garofalo 817). Her identification with other grrrls moved her towards action.

Although several modes of literary criticism argue in favor of examining different aspects of a text—from the reader's response, to the language and form, to the author's intentions—most recognize that it cannot be completely separated from its historical contexts. New Historicists in particular make the claim that "critics need to look not only at the historical causes of literary works, but also at their consequences" (McManus). Influences *from* the text are equally as important as influences *on* the text. Polletta makes the claim that it may not be necessary to be positioned after the text chronologically to see this influence. She explains: "Narratives not only make sense of the past and present but, since the story's chronological end is also its end in the sense of moral, purpose or telos, they project a future," and "this is the basis for self-identity and action" (140). It is this future projected through the text that creates the senses of hope and urgency in its audience, which leads them to eventually identify with the text, its author, the performers, and proceed to action themselves. Action alone, however, is not the equivalent of consubstantiation, but instead a step towards it: being *like* someone else.

The point at which consubstantiation occurs is, according to Selbin, "not just the point at which people begin to think and act like revolutionaries but when they begin to *tell themselves* (italics mine) and embrace stories ... that ennoble them and their actions and carry them through the revolutionary process" (72). Hélène Cixous refers to this as "writ[ing] the body," which is "to flee reality, 'to escape [the] hierarchical bonds'" of linear, dichotomous language structures (Jasken). Afterall, "There are no dichotomies in reality: dichotomizing is an act of mind, not of Nature" (Berthoff 13-14). Language, she



says, is inextricable from sexuality and riot grrrls in particular used their texts to reclaim their identities as sexual beings, survivors of oppression and abuse, and “TRUEPUNKROCKSOULCRUSADERS” (Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). Once grrrls were moved by reading to construct their own identities complementary to the text, they then entered into its context, or what Bakhtin calls its “heteroglossia,” and became revolutionaries, riot grrrls.

Another way that reading these texts influenced individuals to act on their own was by example. Learning that others had acted, particularly if they were successful, provided incentive to attempt to recreate their methods. With the 1960s sit-ins, as with all social movements that have undergone some amount of diffusion, people are led to think, “If they can do it there, we can do it here” (qtd. in Selbin 69). Receiving texts, reading them, and being moved by them to the point of consubstantiation became repetition, mimesis. Through reading articles about riot grrrls, as well as their lyrics and zines, grrrls in areas other than the Pacific Northwest and Washington, DC were moved to create Riot Grrrl texts and chapters of their own, believing, as stated by Rosenberg’s interviewee Jamie, “If these girls can do it, why can’t they?” (qtd. in Rosenberg and Garofalo 820). Another of Rosenberg’s interviewed riot grrrls, Madhu, talks about how “reading” (in a broad sense) the music and lyrics of the movement’s bands “started out as a musical attraction of ‘hey! i can do this!’ [sic] and grew from there” to positive identification, as opposed to discomfort, as a non-white female (a minority) in the suburbs (qtd. in Rosenberg and Garofalo 815). Through mimesis, the retelling of another grrrl’s music, Madhu was able to develop her own identity.

The most idealized and idolized of Riot Grrrl's "highly regarded roles" is arguably Kathleen Hanna. Despite the fact that she claims to feel uncomfortable with being credited as one of Riot Grrrl's foremothers due to the fact that she "was on tour during a big part of RG's [sic] heyday" (Hanna, "Great New Book"), many riot grrrls, particularly the younger generation, place her on a pedestal. For example, in a post on the "Bikini Kill Archive," grrrl Noemie claims Hanna "built her revolution." Another post, by Joan, describes in greater detail her experience viewing a photograph at a co-worker's desk, and her connection with the movement through Hanna:

I still remember ... how it felt to understand, on a visceral level, ... what Kathleen had written on her belly ["slut"], and what that look on her face conveyed. ...

Kathleen and the power of her thought, the power of her very being. She spoke through the image; she told me what every injustice and ridiculousness and near-criminal act ... meant for ... me. ... I can still be in that room whenever I want to think about transmutation. ("Bikini Kill Archive")

What Joan experienced was not only identification with Hanna, but also a moment of sublimity. Also that moment occurred through the "reading" (again, broad use of the term) of a photograph of a female body rather than lyrics or zines, but it is not an experience limited to any rhetorical medium. Her use of the word "transmutation" is also worth noting, as the experience was so sublime that she can revisit that moment at will.

On the process of persuasion, George Campbell theorizes an audience's four needs: Imagination, Passions, Will, and Understanding ("The Philosophy of Rhetoric"). The first of these, Imagination, involves the evocation of sublimity and use of resemblance. The revolutions that began with the reading of bands' lyrics were often also

indebted to other grrrls, whether friends or acquaintances. Examples of this include Denise D.'s "high school girl [on the bus] who had short hair and wore kids[ ' t-shirts], corduroy pants, granny sweaters and chucks" who "played them for [her] and" resulted in Denise D. feeling like she "had no idea what just happened"; Mel-P's "girl with green hair" who "lent [her] a stack of CD's"; and Elle's "cool new girl friend with dyed red hair" who "gave [her] a tape of *The CD* [sic] *Version of the First Two Records* (italics mine)" ("Bikini Kill Archive"). Each of these grrrls associates the discovery of Bikini Kill, and subsequently Riot Grrrl, with another grrrl and her particular style. It is because the texts' heteroglossia, or various meanings, is composed of every Riot Grrrl that this resemblance takes place.

The sublimity of Imagination reaches beyond mere pathos, or the appeal to emotions, and has an almost mystical quality to it. While many riot grrrls on the "Bikini Kill Archive" describe experiences very much akin to sublimity, the most detailed is posted by Joaquin: "The first time I heard Bikini Kill was in the summer of '91. My friend ... was playing me their first cassette ... [as] I looked at a map and the Bikini Kill zine. ... The music, images and ideas mixed in my head and I pictured a cartoon that BK [sic] starred in. I told my friend and he started to illustrate it." After describing the various images brought to mind while listening to, or reading, Bikini Kill's music, Joaquin confesses that they "were both straightedge and starting to freak each other out." Such an experience would be described by Campbell as "the sublime," and by Plato as reading the text's "essence."

Two more of Campbell's mental faculties, Passions and Will, address appealing to an audience through emotion and towards action, respectively. While these needs exist

separately, they often and easily accompany each other. Riot Grrrl, a female empowerment movement, is full of examples (some subtle, others not at all) of grrrls encouraging each other to act. One example, found on the “Bikini Kill Archive,” is a response from Kathleen Hanna to a young grrrl: “Your band is gonna [sic] change the world. Don’t delay, start it now!!!” The emotional, or Passions, aspect of this particular message of encouragement is wrapped up in the author’s identity. Hanna, the queen of Riot Grrrl whether she wants to be or not, is telling that grrrl and every subsequent grrrl who reads that post that they are the new revolutionaries. Such a message from your idol is undoubtedly going to evoke emotion. For some riot grrrls, Will and Passions’ fulfillment is evident in their responses to the movement and its texts. Erin, for example, claims the movement influenced her emotional responses, that it “made [her] angry instead of taking it” (qtd. in Rosenberg and Garofalo 841), and Aria believes “it taught [her] that [her] own revolution could start with not believing some guy when he told [her that she] was worthless” (“Bikini Kill Archive”). Empowerment for these riot grrrls is largely emotional. Similarly, Lauren claims she was “encouraged ... to make mistakes and to be fearless, to be a creator and to contribute” (“Bikini Kill Archive”). Riot Grrrl affected Lauren emotionally, but she explains further how the appeal inspired action (and, arguably, consubstantiation).

The Bikini Kill song, “Double Dare Ya,” from their album *The C.D. Version of the First Two Records*, is approximately two minutes and forty-one seconds of appeal to Passions, Will, and Understanding, which is defined as explanation and clarity. From start to finish it is a message to all grrrls, but especially those girls just then tuning in for the first time—“We’re Bikini Kill and we want revolution girl-style now! Hey, girlfriend,

I got a proposition, goes something like this” (Hanna, et al., “Double Dare Ya”)—explaining the revolution is about being yourself and not compromising that for anyone else. The lyrics themselves are not necessarily anything extraordinary, or radical, but they feel that way for girls who have never been told to “do what you want[,] ... be who you will[,] ... [or] cry right outloud” (Hanna, et al., “Double Dare Ya”). Not only did grrrls experience sublimity, the feeling of being set free, when reading these lyrics, but anyone who remembers childhood can understand the importance Bikini Kill places on these propositions: a “double dare” is not something to be ignored. Furthermore, the band explains to grrrls that they are “big girl[s] now,” that they have “no reason not to fight,” and that they need to “know what [their] rights are” so that they “can stand up for” them (Hanna, et al., “Double Dare Ya”). In one song, Bikini Kill makes both emotional and logical appeals to its audience, its readers, and makes grrrls out of girls.

The final need of an audience described by Campbell is Understanding, which requires the transference of meaning. Bakhtin claims, “understanding comes to fruition only in the response” (282), and, taking “response” to mean “an action or feeling caused by a stimulus or influence” (“response, n.”), as in “reader-response,” it is invaluable that Jaimes describes encountering Bikini Kill’s texts as “everything [he or she] needed to hear [read] but never knew it” (“Bikini Kill Archive”). For many riot grrrls, including Jaimes, the reading experience filled a blank space that they were unaware even existed. Through it they were able to self-identify, create an individualized meaning, and build their own revolutions.

Although arguably of an entirely different Riot Grrrl movement, the UK band Huggy Bear is best known for one song, “Her Jazz,” because of one particular televised

performance after which they accused the host of being sexist and were thrown out of the studio (Raphael 147). The scandalous events after the musical performance, however, are not wholly responsible for the attention the band received following the show's airing. In the song that Huggy Bear performed is one line that rings true to the Riot Grrrl movement (as well as, arguably, punk culture in general): "this is happening without your permission" (Elliott, et al.). Similarly, Bikini Kill's song, "Jigsaw Youth," proclaims the band members, specifically those involved in Riot Grrrl such as Kathleen Hanna, outsiders, or rebels, and details plans to remain that way: "We know there's not one way, one light, one stupid truth. Don't fit your definitions. Don't need your demands. Not into win-lose reality. Won't fit in with your plan" (Hanna, et al.). Riot grrrls reached each other through texts, which appeal to readers' emotions, logic, and will to act, and became not only readers and writers, but producers of their own realities.

While writing and reading are separate activities, they are also essentially linked. As posited in "The Transactional Theory: Against Dualisms" by Louise Rosenblatt, "reading ... is a 'composing' activity, while the very act of writing involves reading" (383). Riot Grrrl's purpose was to empower women to become producers—of their own texts, identities, realities, and revolutions—but the act of production is not limited to writing. Reading, much like cognition, creates individual meaning, from which revolutions are born. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin explains heteroglossia as the following: "the word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (293). Composition, involving both reading and writing, is social as no one operates within a

vacuum. “Reading Riot Grrrl,” then, was as circular as what Cixous calls “writing the body”: as one grrrl read the narrative/text of another, such as a song by Bratmobile, she composed the identity of that author as well as her own, and therefore when she later composed her own narrative/text, existing within it was her identity, that of the aforementioned author, as well as all riot grrrls existing before, after, and in between.

Through the production and reception of Riot Grrrl texts, grrrls shared their experiences and united under the commonalities of exclusion and repression. Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* is often referenced in philosophy as representational of the divide between the immediate reality and the metaphysical wherein lies the essence of truth, accessible only to the elite and enlightened. It also appears in education as a metaphor for the unlearned student, as well as the nonbeliever in religion. For third wave feminism, Bikini Kill’s “Feels Blind” equates the female experience (note: *not* the grrrl experience) to existing as a prisoner within Plato’s cave:

If you could see but were always taught that what you saw wasn’t fuckin’ real, yeah. How does it feel? It feels blind. How does it feel? Well, it feels fuckin’ blind. What have you taught me? Nothing. Look what you have taught me, your world has taught me nothing. As a woman I was taught to always be hungry.

Yeah, women are well acquainted with thirst. Yeah, we could eat just about anything. We might even eat your hate up like love. (Hanna, et al., “Feels Blind”)

For the female prisoner, the immediate reality consisting of shadows is the patriarchal society that has demanded certain behaviors of her and fed her false knowledge. Riot Grrrl, then, did not simply call for change within the sexist, masculine punk movement,

but the radical, revolutionary overthrow of a reality that relied on a sexist, classist, racist, and ageist system—the destabilization of the center.

By sharing personal and taboo experiences in their texts, grrrls often developed strong relationships with each other through correspondence, creating a diverse and widespread community with the common goal of overthrowing an oppressive, patriarchal society. Essentially, grrrls participated in a form of cultural pedagogy arguably similar to Paulo Freire’s proposed problem-solving education system where teachers and students are consubstantial—or, in this case, authors and readers who are both producers of meaning. Riot Grrrl band members and zine producers did not create just for their own voices to be heard, but to share ideas and experiences, to start conversations and a discourse community within which they felt validated and safe. In one zine a grrrl writes, “Wimmin [sic] need to learn that power is not given, we have to take it. We need to realize that we don’t have to stand around and be treated like this. Don’t let anyone control you or dictate your life to you ... No one can save you from your oppression except yourself. GIRLS UNITE!” (qtd. in Kearney, “Riot Grrrl,” 302). In this very Freire-esque statement it is clear that prince charming, if he even exists, cannot save you but instead simply shift the context of your imprisonment. Furthermore, Riot Grrrl itself could not save you—the movement on its own could not liberate a grrrl from the oppressive society within which she was raised—but it could provide the support and strength to free yourself. Riot Grrrl zines and music functioned as dialectical argument for grrrls as they searched for their truths and voices in a society that insisted they remain silent.



The pedagogy of Riot Grrrl is that each individual grrrl must liberate herself and that the best education is participation and performance. In the song, “Distinct Complicity,” Bikini Kill sings, “Don’t waste your life in school. You could go back anytime and I wanna see you on tour” (Hanna, et al.). Many of the mainstream articles on Riot Grrrl attempted to belittle the movement by pointing out the grrrls’ amateur statuses as musicians. Assumptions were made about the clumsiness in the grrrls’ handling of their instruments and the dissonance of their chords—that these were accidental and thus support not taking the music seriously. After all, “Feedback is the band’s favorite noise ... [because] Bikini Kill are activists, not musicians” (qtd. in Hanna, et al., “Thurston Hearts the Who”). These critics were not entirely wrong. Furthermore, some riot grrrls preferred the term “performance artist,” which is somewhat more encompassing, instead of either “activist” or “musician.” Nevertheless, it is because they were both activists and musicians—feminists and punk rockers embracing the DIY ethos—that they celebrated the amateur look and sound of their productions in order to “[encourage] more girls to feel that they, too, [could] be makers and not just consumers of media fare” (Douglas 45). It was for the purpose of consubstantiation, of reducing the space between the artists and audience, that riot grrrls strived to make their struggles, processes, and development transparent.

The grrrls’ stated purpose was female empowerment, but their true purpose, their motive, was the destruction of the patriarchy, the destabilization of the center. In discussing the larger context of “cool,” Leland, in *Hip: The History*, explores the relationship between women and what society has considered “hip,” using Riot Grrrl and Kathleen Hanna’s insistence on “claiming ‘dork’ as cool ... [to] confuse and disrupt [the]

whole process” of “cool attributes ... [being claimed] by ... society as ‘male’” as an example (255-6). Furthermore, Lauraine Leblanc’s *Pretty in Punk* quotes riot grrrls as believing that “they will ‘never meet the hierarchical BOY standards of talented, or cool, or smart’ [and] argue that if they do meet them, ‘[they] will become tokens’” (132). The goals of the Riot Grrrl movement were, in many ways, two sides of the same coin: empowering women involves a redistribution of power, which destabilizes the (now former) ruling class. Since Riot Grrrl was concerned with both construction and deconstruction, blank and anti-space, it could not fully achieve “a room of [its] own” because it could not escape measuring itself against that which it opposed; it was inextricable from what it was not.

In Hanna’s Riot Grrrl manifesto, she calls for grrrls to resist traditional definitions of cool because they are created and sustained by a patriarchal and oppressive culture. If grrrls are true to themselves and measure against these definitions then they will never be “cool,” and if they somehow reach that high bar then they have sold out, given up, and joined the boy’s club. For many grrrls, it was frustrating when the media paid so much attention to their clothes and hairstyles because they saw through this attention to appearance as a slight against the movement and individual grrrls. In “Cool Schmool,” Bratmobile sings, “See, I don’t know why you’re always telling me what’s so cool about what I’m wearing when you can’t even tell me how you feel and you can’t even be my friend for real” (Neuman, et al.). If these journalists were unable to participate and write their own bodies, then they were also unable to comprehend the movement and its definition of cool. The attitude adopted regarding this lack of understanding by Bikini Kill echoes the sentiment of Hanna’s manifesto as well as her suggestion of blank space

in the place of “big dumb glossy magazine” articles on Riot Grrrl: apathy. The message in the band’s song “I Like Fucking” when Hanna sings dreamily, “She’s so very I don’t care,” further supported by a similar apathetic claim in “Statement of Vindication,” seems to be that riot grrrls were cool in a way you could not understand and they were beyond giving a damn (Hanna, et al.).

Arguably the most well known song from the movement is Bikini Kill’s “Rebel Girl,” which has been referred to by scholars and the media as the grrrls’ anthem. In the song Hanna sings about a girl—her “best friend” and “soul sister”—who is the coolest around, evident in her stylish clothes, rebelliousness, and strength (Hanna, et al., “Rebel Girl”). In *Girls to the Front*, Marcus comments: “The rebel girl is the queen of ‘my,’ not ‘our,’ world—the ‘70s collectivism ... has morphed into the self-centered language of alienated adolescence and been adapted for the political primacy, especially potent in the early ‘90s, of the personal story” (110-111). For Riot Grrrl and third wave feminism, the personal was very political and the maintenance of individuality within the group was essential.

Not only was individuality within the movement important, but the grrrls also used obscenity in their music and zines to evoke a pathos of rebellion and mark a separation from their oppressors; however, their goals might not have been achieved and instead the obscenities and violence might have had a very different effect on their male audiences. While Bikini Kill’s “I Like Fucking” is paired with “I Hate Danger,” Bratmobile complains, “I just wanna fuck you,” as they accuse, “You just want to stab me and fuck the wounds” (Neuman, et al., “Juswanna” and “Stab”). In a study from 1991 on “The Effects of Sexually Violent Rock Music on Males’ Acceptance of Violence

Against Women,” researchers Janet S. St. Lawrence and Doris J. Joyner admit that “there appears to be some validity to civic concerns that exposure to heavy-metal rock music may produce negative effects on males’ attitudes toward women” and that “pornography arouses aggression rather than sexual arousal” (59). These conclusions echo the views of many anti-pornography feminists in the 1980s, but they also raise interesting questions regarding Riot Grrrl. The use of obscenity and violence in Riot Grrrl music directly addressed the power relationships they sought to overthrow by saying, “You want me to be silent, but I will scream and fight so that I cannot be ignored,” but they might also have acted as fuel to the fire by increasing the divide and hostility between grrrls and men.

Riot Grrrl music refused comfort to not only its male audiences, but also its fellow grrrls. In “Music, Violence, Truth,” Ben Watson explains that, “by facing the horrors of an unbalanced world, by making us experience its terror and violence and sorrow, radical music offers the satisfaction of truth rather than the blandishments of comfort. It arms the psyche for reality.” Defeating the often unspoken horrors of reality begins with naming them, calling them out from their hiding places within imaginations and denial, and boldly confronting them head-on. In “Liar,” Bikini Kill seeks to do just that as they claim, “Eat meat / hate blacks / beat your fuckin’ wife / it’s all the same thing” (Hanna, et al.). As explained by feminist-vegetarian Carol J. Adams, “Specifically in regard to rape victims and battered women, the death experience of animals acts to illustrate the lived experience of women” (67). Not only does Adams argue convincingly in her text *The Sexual Politics of Meat* that “eat[ing] meat” and “beat[ing] your fuckin’ wife” are “the same thing,” but each of these acts involves a power relationship that Riot

Grrrl opposed. The claim's shock value holds the audience hostage while Bikini Kill continues to sing, "all we are saying is give peace a chance," accompanied by screaming vocals that nearly overpower the words (Hanna, et al., "Liar"). Through all of this, the message is clear: peace and comforting words are not enough to combat this reality.

As previously stated, a lot of Riot Grrrl's texts were very personal and addressed taboo issues, such as sexuality, abuse, rape, and incest. In zines and lyrics, grrrls explored their feelings and experiences, unafraid of expressing their anger and pain. They wrote as women, they wrote themselves, their "bodies," and yet these written identities were composed of the men and abusers that they were attempting to write out. Bikini Kill's song "Suck My Left One" is about female empowerment—the reversal of the abuser-victim relationship—in the face of society demanding "a polite girl" who "show[s] a little respect for [her] father," and the song "Don't Need You" repeats the message in the title over and over again to other grrrls: "*Us girls* (italics mine), we don't need you" (Hanna, et al.). While the men remain present in these songs, the focus is positive and on the grrrls. In some of Bikini Kill's songs, however, men are generalized ("Star Bellied Boy") as celebrated sluts ("The Anti-Pleasure Dissertation") who rape meaning ("Demirep"), and misrepresent themselves and others over whom they have power ("I Hate Danger") (Hanna, et al.).

Aside from zines and lyrics, riot grrrls are also producers of performance. One of their tactics is the literal application of Hélène Cixous' "writing the body": writing *on* the body. On her intentions when "writing on the body," Hanna states the following: "I felt that if I wrote 'slut' or 'whore' or 'incest victim' on my stomach, then I wouldn't just be silent. I thought a lot of guys might be thinking this anyway when they looked at my

picture, so this would be like holding up a mirror to what they were thinking” (qtd. in Thompson 65). Is the effect what grrrls intended, though? Writing on something is a way of claiming, or conquering, it. Writing words such as “slut” and “whore” on the female body, especially with a pen (phallus), not only assigns the identity of “slut” and “whore” to that woman and ownership of her to man, but also implies that before she was claimed, or entered, by man, she was empty. A woman without a man is, of course, nothing but a blank space. Stacy Thompson, author of *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business*, explains it as “the contradiction between the sexist fantasy of woman as whore, slut, etc. and the symbolic embodiment of that fantasy in the shape of a living Grrrl explodes the fantasy and shatters the reality that it supported by shifting it from the realm of the imaginary into the symbolic order” (66). In simplified terms, Riot Grrrls attempted to visually deconstruct this “sexist fantasy” by, as Hanna says in the Bikini Kill song “Sugar,” being a “self-fulfilling porno queen” and “mimic[king] out [man’s] every fucking fantasy” (Hanna, et al.). While the act mainly elicits eye-rolling and drooling from male audiences, writing provocative words on the female body is inspiring and empowering for many grrrls—and is that not the stated purpose of Riot Grrrl?

We are all influenced by others’ stories, whether consciously or not. Polletta suspects that “activists’ very understandings of ‘strategy,’ ‘interest,’ ‘identity,’ and ‘politics’ may be structured by the oppositions and hierarchies that come from familiar stories” (142). As there is not one way to be an activist, nor is it something that we are explicitly taught while growing up, it makes sense that each group’s struggle for social change is shaped by others who have come before, from the stories that have been shared by the activists of earlier movements and generations. Explaining heteroglossia, Bakhtin

says “the word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context” (284). Every word that we use—“activist,” “revolution,” “change”—is inherently composed of multiple contexts, of meanings from an infinite number of other users. Bakhtin also theorizes that “each generation at each social level has its own language; moreover, every age group has as a matter of fact its own language;” however, he clarifies, “languages do not *exclude* each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways” (290-291). From this perspective, no one revolution is entirely unique, or original, and all social movements and their agents have influenced all others, whether intentionally or not. The Riot Grrrl movement was undoubtedly influenced by a variety of other people, movements, and ideologies, but its creation consisted of *internal* revolutions that spread outward. Without its texts, the lyrics of bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile and the zines of an unknown number of brave grrrls, it would have died out much sooner and smaller. As Selbin says, “People make revolutions; it is the stories they tell that enable them to do so” (74).

## CHAPTER TWO

“BIG DUMB GLOSSY MAGAZINE”: HOW THE MAINSTREAM DEFINES RIOT  
GRRRL

Riot Grrrl found itself the subject of several mainstream news articles throughout the early 1990s, with the vast majority of them written and published in 1992. Riot Grrrl viewed these articles at first as potentially helpful to their cause as they could reach and awaken girls in areas outside of Washington, DC and Olympia, Washington. Kathleen Hanna named nonexistent Riot Grrrl chapters in towns across the U.S. in interviews in the hopes that her language would create a more widespread Riot Grrrl reality, that girls would look for these chapters and start their own when their searches turned up empty. Towards the end of 1992, however, the grrrls grew tired of being misrepresented by the media and called for a blackout: no interviews with reporters, nothing. This decision marked a moment of separation, however slight, between Riot Grrrl and third wave feminism as the former took “the media” as their focus, their devil term.

Whether Riot Grrrl is viewed as a fledgling punk movement or a phase of the third wave, it can be said that the Riot Grrrl manifesto written by Kathleen Hanna and included in a *Bikini Kill* zine circa 1992 is indicative of what Stewart, Smith, and Denton, authors of *Persuasion and Social Movements*, term the Social Unrest stage of social movements. The authors claim that “an initial act may be the calling of a convention or conference of like-minded people to form an organization” (Stewart, Smith, and Denton 90), much like the first Riot Grrrl convention in the summer of 1992 that shifted the movement from “potential” to “imminent.” Indeed, during the Social Unrest stage “the



mass media may note with interest, amusement, or mild foreboding the claims or overtures of the infant social movement” (Stewart, Smith, and Denton 92). Two weeks before the first Riot Grrrl convention in Washington, DC, that is exactly what happened.

Although the grrrls had held weekly meetings in both DC and Olympia for a year by this point, the media remained mostly unaware until the summer of the first Riot Grrrl convention. Featured in *LA Weekly*, “the first nonzine article on Riot Grrrl” came out in “mid-July 1992,” although *Sassy*, “that mainstream purveyor of alternative culture to teenage girls, had by this point run brief items on Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, *Jigsaw*, and the Riot Grrrl DC zine” (Marcus 159). The difference between the periodicals’ stories, however, was that “it [*Sassy*] never attempted to encapsulate the movement in a feature article” (Marcus 159). Furthermore, Erin Smith, a member of the band Bratmobile, interned at *Sassy* during the summer of 1991 and therefore gave the magazine some Riot Grrrl credibility that the *LA Times* and other publications lacked. It was because of *Sassy*’s articles, though, that the outside world began to notice and grow curious about the movement. In June of 1991, Molly Neuman of Bratmobile received a letter from “Jillian L. Kogan, Assistant Promotion Coordinator of the Trumpet Club,” asking for more information on Neuman and Allison Wolfe’s zine *Girl Germs* for her “kid’s school book club” (“Girl Germs”). Once the strange and varied correspondence began to pile up, the grrrls knew they were in for something big.

Early in 1992, Kathi Wilcox of Bikini Kill wrote to Neuman to prepare her for what she could feel coming, for the inevitable: “I just want you to know we’re gonna be famous. ... Fame on a larger scale than we know now, big. ... mark these words, baby, ... in a year, two, we’ll see... not that this is our goal or desire but the momentum is there

and it's completely beyond our control" ("Correspondence Filed Under W"). Indeed, the Riot Grrrl movement received much more attention from mainstream news publications than it ever anticipated. As soon as one article was published, another journalist showed up at a Riot Grrrl meeting or concert to fish for information and jump on board the Revolution Girl Style bandwagon. Despite their hesitance, the grrrls allowed the attention at first and viewed it as simply more evidence of the necessity and importance of their growing movement. As the articles began to surface, however, the grrrls' anger directed itself at the media and their cynicism hardened. In another letter to Neuman in 1992, just before the convention, one grrrl wrote:

why [sic] does usa today, abc, nbc, cbs, and every other corporate media fuck want to get a hold of bikini kill and riot grrrl? because theyre [sic] not fools – they know somethings [sic] happening too – but theyre [sic] terrified of it and they want to take it and twist it and package it and spit it out to the masses as the next latest thing in order to kill it. we [sic] have to understand that they will try sneakily and unrelentingly to suck the life out of our fight and we have to be ready. ("Correspondence Filed Under H [2 of 2]")

That first article in the *LA Times* was sympathetic to the grrrls—written by a Sarah Lawrence graduate who studied French feminist theorists and believed “the Riot Girls [had] the right kind of rhetoric.... The language of crisis” (Marcus 160-161)—but those that followed approached Riot Grrrl differently. The articles that followed Emily White’s sympathetic *LA Times* coverage created an entirely different movement than was intended and led many of the grrrls to distrust the media entirely, call for a blackout, and refuse to speak to the mainstream media about Riot Grrrl for years.

The *Washington Post* article that made references to Kathleen Hanna's personal life and history with abuse without verification or permission cemented both her and the movement's opposition to the media. From the grrrls' points of view, these outlets were not just attacking the movement, but the grrrls themselves. Furthermore, as the stories about Riot Grrrl continued to surface, the grrrls' meetings demanded discussion about the movement's relationship with the media. In Sara Marcus' *Girls to the Front*, one Riot Grrrl, Ananda, recounts this period of time: "Suddenly every meeting had to be spent on whether or not to grant interviews to such-and-such a journalist or magazine, instead of on our own lives and other things we wanted to do and talk about" (182). Not only did the media come to control the public image of Riot Grrrl, writing its history (herstory?) for it, but also it infiltrated the grrrls' meetings, their sacred spaces, without even being physically present. More and more the media, which perpetuated the "isms" to which Riot Grrrl was opposed, became the enemy attempting to disrupt the movement the way it had feminism less than a decade earlier.

One of the difficulties in discussing Riot Grrrl is separating the truth from the myth—or, rather, the positive myth from the negative myth—the latter of which was created by mainstream media and then sustained by repetition over the last two decades. Francesca Polletta explains in, "'It Was like a Fever ...' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest," that "highly regarded roles within communities may come to be linked with activism in a way that makes participation a requirement of the role" (143). Despite what the bands might have wanted, Bikini Kill and Bratmobile were inextricably associated with Riot Grrrl's foundation through the publication of their zine with the same name. In

an essay included with Bikini Kill's 1994 album, *The C.D. Version of the First Two Records*, drummer Tobi Vail clarified for fans and riot grrrls with the following:

One huge misconception ... is that Bikini Kill is the definitive 'riot girl band'...

We are not in any way 'leaders of' or authorities on the 'Riot Girl' movement. In fact, as individuals, we have each had different experiences with, feelings on, opinions of and varying degrees of involvement with 'Riot Girl' and ... we have never used that term to describe ourselves AS A BAND [sic]. (Vail)

However, the association was irreversible. Nirvana's fame produced the anecdote<sup>2</sup> where Kathleen Hanna named Nirvana's hit "Smells Like Teen Spirit," which led the media directly to the Riot Grrrl movement.

Although touring limited her interaction with various Riot Grrrl groups, Hanna was instrumental in the movement's formation and therefore protective of it. When approached for an interview by the *Houston Chronicle* circa Riot Grrrl's media blackout, declined: "Our integrity is being taken away by the media and the powers of exploitation. ... You should respect us as an underground movement. The nicest thing you could do is not write an article about us. Or *have a blank space where the article would be* (italics mine)—that would be even nicer" (qtd. in Thompson 60). After attempting to cooperate with the media, riot grrrls felt they were completely misrepresented and degraded, and therefore it is not surprising that they resisted further cooperation. They did realize, though, the power and reach of the media, particularly in attracting more girls to the movement. Hanna's decline, then, is an attempted compromise: it may be acknowledged that the Riot Grrrl revolution exists, but a blank space should be left to prevent the author

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<sup>2</sup> In August of 1990, Kathleen Hanna and Kurt Cobain vandalized a "fake abortion clinic" and later, after getting drunk, Hanna wrote, "Kurt smells like Teen Spirit," on Cobain's bedroom wall with a Sharpie marker (Hanna, "Our Hit Parade").

from projecting meanings on the movement and to also allow new girls to respond, create their own meanings, and fill in that space (this will be examined further in Chapter Three).

Farai Chideya's *Newsweek* article in November of 1992 features Jessica Hopper, a Riot Grrrl who not only broke the blackout by speaking to a reporter, but also betrayed her fellow grrrls by misrepresenting them and the movement further. Chideya manages to "make light of" and generalize the movement with statements such as, "Riot Girl is feminism with a loud happy face dotting the 'i,'" and the claim that Riot Grrrl was "young, white, urban and middle class" (Marcus 212). It is important to note that the (latter) generalization is not entirely false, but its presence in a mainstream source—particularly one featuring input from a member of Riot Grrrl—damaged the movement. It categorized Riot Grrrl, portrayed it as a club that you could not gain entrance to unless you fit this profile, and thus made it more difficult for the grrrls to transcend the whiteness that many of them already recognized as a (potential) limitation.

The by-line of Chideya's *Newsweek* article reads, "Meet the Riot Grrrls—a sassy new breed of feminists for the MTV age." Throughout the piece two other references to MTV and video are made in connection to the Riot Grrrls, essentially attempting to define the grrrls by the media and culture that they opposed. Chideya acknowledges the Riot Grrrl shock value practice of writing words like "rape" and "slut" on their exposed torsos and limbs as "an MTV-era way of saying, 'That's what you think of me; confront your own bigotry.'" In 1991, approximately one year earlier, MTV produced a documentary titled *MTV Generation*. Shortly after the *New York Times* describes this generation as "young adults struggling to establish a cultural niche for themselves,

something that will distinguish them from the hippies and baby boomers and yuppies of times past" (O'Connor). This association dilutes the Riot Grrrls' movement to nothing more than adolescent rebellion and cynicism typical of the grrrls' age group.

Several other comments made throughout the 1992 *Newsweek* article are easily interpreted as negative portrayals of Riot Grrrl. For example, Chideya claims riot grrrls were "inflamed not so much by economic issues as by social ones—incest, child abuse, abortion, eating disorders, harassment." Although authorial intention is unclear, this statement seems very similar to a typical backhanded insult between political parties over "the 'real' issues." Chideya confesses, "There's no telling whether this enthusiasm or the Riot Grrrls' catchy passion for 'Revolution Girl Style' will evaporate when it hits the *adult real world* (italics mine)." While it may be true that the majority of the grrrls were between the ages fifteen and twenty-five, and the movement's alteration and reclamation of the word "girl" is evidence of the significance of youth for the Riot Grrrls, it is insulting to imply the grrrls' youth meant lack of political and economic awareness. Furthermore, if those aforementioned social issues—particularly "incest, child abuse, [and] abortion"—are not "adult" and "real," then I am not entirely sure what is (Chideya and Rossi).

Following Chideya's *Newsweek* article, the movement became further stratified: it was already heavily white and middle class, but then attention was drawn to the movement's issues with race and class; it encouraged individualism and action, but a grrrl standing up against the blackout "betrayed" the movement. Beginning in late 1992 and moving into 1993, Riot Grrrl began to exhibit some characteristics of the Mobilization stage of a social movement. First, "persons who do not join the movement and former

members are labeled traitors” (Stewart, Smith, and Denton 98). Both can be seen in the example of the *Newsweek* article since Hopper was then designated a “former member,” and Chideya, who talked to the grrrls about being a feminist herself, was an outsider who only at first appeared to be an ally. The “us versus them” aspect of the movement developed a new dimension at this point and, no matter how many grrrls claimed otherwise in their zines, it became clear that every girl was *not* a riot grrrl. In another article, published in the *Washington Post*, an anonymous “24-year-old former grrrl” explains why she is no longer involved with the movement: “It’s not that I don’t still believe the feminist line or anything, and of course I’m still a vegetarian, but after a while being in it that intensely starts to get to you. I sound like I’m getting old, don’t I? But that’s what it is. I feel too old to be a Riot Grrrl” (qtd. in Spencer). Yet again, Riot Grrrl found itself distorted and victim of the media’s “divide and conquer” tactics. How could someone on the outside of the movement even hope to understand them?

Most news articles written about the Riot Grrrl movement make comparisons between the girls and other famous women that misrepresent the grrrls’ politics and purposes. The aforementioned *Newsweek* article, for instance, contains a quote from Camille Paglia, a controversial critic who Chideya calls a “Riot Grrrl wanna-be,” that equates Madonna’s style and sexuality with the riot grrrls. In a *New York Times* article that preceded *Newsweek* by eight days, Ann Japenga describes Kathleen Hanna as a “new punk Madonna” with a “seductive stage manner.” The fact that Hanna worked as a stripper at one point is often mentioned in articles on Riot Grrrl as well, as though qualifying any of the grrrls as sexy and powerful diminishes the power and legitimacy of the movement as a whole. Japenga also describes Hanna as “scold[ing]” the men in the

audience as if to say that they “had better behave themselves if they wanted to hang around,” giving Hanna an authoritarian role in the movement almost like that of a sexy schoolteacher or librarian—a fantasy. In Chideya’s article, Jessica Hopper designates Courtney Love of the band Hole as the “patron saint” of Riot Grrrl even though “the musician actually had an open antipathy for Riot Grrrl and anybody associated with it—especially, it seemed, anybody associated with it who had been close with [Kurt] Cobain before she had met him, namely Kathleen [Hanna] and Tobi [Vail]” of Bikini Kill (Marcus 212). These false associations drawn by the media infinitely contributed to the misunderstanding of Riot Grrrl as a movement associated with any and all strong female musicians in the early 1990s and continuing over the last two decades.

Many articles and a large portion of the academic scholarship on Riot Grrrl have concentrated on its influences in music and popular culture, from Alanis Morissette to the Spice Girls. This is particularly interesting since Riot Grrrl was viewed as “a movement that apparently seeks to alienate” and “shows no sign of fading, though it’s not exactly breaking through” (France). One of the musicians that inspired Riot Grrrl bands, Joan Jett, brought the movement back into the focus of the media during the mid-1990s when she provided guest vocals for Bikini Kill and teamed up with Kathleen Hanna for one of her own albums. Jett, a self-proclaimed fan of the grrrls, once claimed, “it doesn’t matter even if they’re not around. The whole point is not to be around forever” (qtd. in France). This may be true, but the movement’s effects on feminism and music can still be seen today, which raises the question of whether or not they ever really left. Riot Grrrl especially affected female musicians. As Kim Gordon explains in support of Courtney Love’s supposed frustrations with the movement, “The problem now ... is that if you’re a



woman in a band, riot grrrl has become a yardstick by which you're measured. I don't have anything against it. But I've been doing what I do for ten years" (qtd. in France). Approximately sixteen years after the so-called dissipation of the movement, female musicians are finally no longer complaining about Riot Grrrl being "a catchall phrase for female performers" and are instead openly praising its influence (McDonnell).

During the 1990s, the term Riot Grrrl came to designate not only female performers, but also girls wearing certain clothes and particular hairstyles. Some of the most frustrating articles for riot grrrls were the ones focused on style that imply the movement had a dress code. Like Chideya's article that generalizes Jessica Hopper's appearance as that of the movement as a whole, Japenga dresses the grrrls in "cinched-waist dresses[,] ... incandescent red lipstick[,] ... heavy black high-top boots and hacked-off punk hair," or "a deliberately nerdy or dowdy appearance, a challenge to the cultural expectation that women should strive to be pretty." It is fascinating that these grrrls were so identifiable, that such generalizations could be made about the style, dress, and interests of grrrls in a scene of which "no one knows" its breadth and effect (Japenga). Also focusing on Riot Grrrl fashions creates further complications in the debate over whether the grrrls are musicians or political activists for those trying to define them.

Japenga's article, titled "Punk's Girl Groups are Putting the Self Back in Self-Esteem," refer to Riot Grrrl as "so-called girl bands" and "a grass-roots movement," claiming "no one knows how widespread the scene has become." First, bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile are referenced in the title as "girl groups," then later as "so-called girl bands," which belittles their legitimacy and talent as musicians. This is common in texts about Riot Grrrl: often the music was ignored or trivialized in order to

shift the focus to the politics, which were also treated with the all too familiar Reagan-Bush anti-feminist sentiment. Evelyn McDonnell, for instance, explains in her 1996 *New York Times* article, “Riot Grrrl Returns, With a Slightly Softer Roar,” that Riot Grrrl’s “focus on identity ... has backfired against the artists' own intentions[,] ... as critics have ignored their music while scrutinizing their ideologies. These are rock groups, after all, not special-interest groups.” Apparently critics are bothered by the very idea of rock groups having social and political agendas. Japenga attacks the very identity of riot grrrls by claiming that “to call herself a Riot Grrrl, a woman need only rally to the slogan ‘Revolution Girl Style Now’ and appreciate bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile.” This was not a movement at all—not worthy of “scrutinizing ... ideologies”—she says, but merely a scene that revolved around catchy phrases and tunes (McDonnell).

One of the most interesting passages in any of the contemporary articles on the Riot Grrrl movement is the list of “five assumptions about riot grrrls” that appears in Kim France’s 1993 *Rolling Stone* piece. They appear as follows: “They can’t play. They hate men. They’re fakers. They’re elitist. They aren’t really a movement” (France). A few of these assumptions have been contested over the years, but the last statement remains intriguing. Much of the scholarship over the last two decades has alternated between various descriptors when referencing Riot Grrrl, including scene, genre, revolution, movement, and subculture (all are applicable). Also, although the feminist movement has fought hard throughout its existence to separate itself from identification as man hating, and this list states such a thing is merely an assumption about Riot Grrrl, the truth is that some riot grrrls embrace this hatred. In fact, Jessica Hopper is quoted in Chideya’s *Newsweek* article as writing in her zine, “I used to say that I hated men. I guess I actually

did.” Then again, as France posits, “Riot grrrl’s unifying principle is that being female is inherently confusing and contradictory.” The movement itself, it turns out, thrived on contradiction.

Many news articles employed the sexism and anti-feminism of the 1980s, the decade during which most of the riot grrrls came of age. France’s *Rolling Stone* article titled, “Grrrls at War,” describes riot grrrls as “she-devils out of Rush Limbaugh’s worst nightmare” who have “stampeded into popular consciousness,” “hate the media’s guts,” and have “come for your daughters.” Although most of these statements are true, the last is most likely made in jest, despite the fact that the movement did aim to enlighten other girls through music and zines. Then again, it is also true that Riot Grrrl coalesced during a very politically conservative and anti-feminist decade. In fact, “Michelle Fine, a professor of psychology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York,” describes the grrrls as “the individualistic daughters of the Reagan-Bush years” (Japenga). Whether or not Riot Grrrl was the menacing and indoctrinating group that the right wing would perhaps willingly make them out to be, they were apparently psychologically a product and consequence of extreme conservative politics and policy.

Furthermore, Japenga’s *New York Times* article also cites Lyn Mikel Brown, co-author of *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development*, as claiming riot grrrls “are the girls who get sent to therapy or get kicked out of school.” It may be argued that by identifying the culture and system that produced these so-called troubled grrrls, Japenga is placing blame on Reagan era politics and anti-feminism for the grrrls’ anger and rebellion and therefore sympathizing with the movement. However,

many see it differently, including Marion Leonard in “‘Rebel Girl, You Are the Queen of My World’: Feminism, ‘Subculture,’ and Grrrl Power”:

[B]y equating youth subculture with delinquent culture one immediately marginalises [sic] its position and undermines its importance as legitimate expression. This point has particular relevance with respect to riot grrrl. To place riot grrrl in a tradition of delinquent youth theory would be to ignore the nature of its protest and dismiss its feminist objectives as mere teen dissent. (241)

Despite what side these journalists might be on, their fear mongering expressions and inclusion of psychologists as experts on grrrls’ development and dysfunction certainly make them appear to be the enemies of the Riot Grrrl movement.

One of the few articles that attempt to portray Riot Grrrl accurately is Ann Powers’ “No Longer Rock’s Playthings” published in the *New York Times* in 1993. Unlike others, Powers attempts to shed light on Riot Grrrl’s contradictory nature and its definition as a movement that refuses to be defined:

The women behind this amorphous movement distrust conventional politics, shun media labels and decry attempts to lump their divergent musical work into one unseemly category. These women have no specific name for their new paradigm.

They're just interested in claiming it as their own.

Many of the original so-called members of Riot Grrrl, the activists and zine writers who eventually became the members of the movement’s most beloved bands, have claimed that they never named the movement Riot Grrrl specifically—that, instead, the grrrls who devoured their music and zines claimed it as their own, the media later latched onto the label, and the rest is history. Indeed, language creates reality. Powers also references a

document in her article on Riot Grrrl that she calls “the declaration by the Bohemian Women’s Political Alliance,” which exclaims, “We are the weird girls who didn’t fit in, ... the bad girls[.] ... We are the women your preachers warn you about” (Powers). The connection that Powers makes between Riot Grrrl and this document is especially accurate and powerful as it sounds very much like Bikini Kill’s song, “Finale,” in which the band members sing: “We’re the girls with the bad reputations. We’re the girls gonna make you pay. We’re the girls with the bad reputation. We are gonna have our say” (Hanna, et al.). The album featuring this song, however, was not released until three years after the circulation of Power’s article.

Another article from 1993, written by Linda Keene for the *Seattle Times*, is sympathetic to not only the movement, but also the grrrls’ distrust of the media. Keene describes attending a Riot Grrrl show and attempting to interview a particular grrrl, but to no avail: “Her attire is crying for recognition; her head is shaking its reluctance. ... And perhaps for good reason.” She then goes on to list some of the publications that jumped at the chance to cover Riot Grrrl in articles throughout the movement’s first couple of years and the condescending statements they made about the grrrls’ images, youth, and politics. With such a complex and varied movement and a difficult relationship with the media, it is no wonder the grrrls felt misrepresented.

Mainstream periodicals were not, however, the only sources to distort the grrrls’ music and identities. In 1994, in a letter from Erin Smith to Neuman, a review of their band Bratmobile featured in the zine *Chickfactor* is discussed as portraying the grrrls negatively despite the author’s access to the band members and “the truth.” Regarding this review, written by *Chickfactor*’s co-founder Gail O’Hara, Smith says, “What

bothered me is: It's o.k. if she really doesn't like Bratmobile and wants to give us a bad review. But it seems like she had a negative idea from the beginning. She had way [sic] too much personal, inside knowledge ... to write such a lame review" ("Correspondence Filed Under S [4 of 4]"). Much like the betrayal to the movement by Jessica Hopper, grrrls also felt betrayed by their fellow feminist zine creators and that burned worse than the most condescending mainstream articles. Additionally, it complicated Riot Grrrl representation even further: taking the *New York Times*' description of the movement with a grain of salt was one thing, but zines were supposed to be different.

Beginning in 1992, Erika Reinstein and May Summer began *Riot Grrrl Press* out of Washington, DC to create a central organization and publication for accessing grrrl zines and events. These grrrls saw a rise in media interest in Riot Grrrl and responded to it by attempting to unify a widespread and differentiated movement, believing that such an action would help protect the grrrls' identities and goals from being perverted and mocked. In 1997, after most of the Riot Grrrl bands had split up, *Riot Grrrl Press* continued to run and lists the following as one of the reasons for its existence:

self representation. we [sic] need to make ourselves visible without using mainstream media as a tool. Under the guise of helping us spread the word, corporate media has co-opted & trivialized a movement of angry girls that could be truly threatening & revolutionary. & even besides that it has distorted our views of each other & created hostility, tension, & jealousy in a movement supposedly about girl support & girl love. In a time when riot grrrl has become the next big trend, we need to take back control & find our own voices again.

("Riot Grrrl Press")

Despite the solid effort to preserve the movement and its former momentum, *Riot Grrrl Press* eventually dissolved in the late 1990s as the members of Bikini Kill, the last original Riot Grrrl band standing, finally split and went separate ways. Without the bands that sparked the movement and a central organization for communication and zine publication, it is no wonder that many mainstream and zine sources finally pronounced the movement dead.

Consensus places the end of the Riot Grrrl revolution circa 1995, but why this date and how the movement ended remain unclear. Most of the Riot Grrrl bands broke up around this time, including Bratmobile who rejoined years later to tour and record again, but Bikini Kill did not break up for a few more years. The movement's true lifespan is mostly unknown, but Bikini Kill's album *Reject All American*, released in 1996, seems to comment on its passing in the song "Jet Ski": "I'm not ... your movie set ... Not your avant-garde postcard idea ... I'm not your footnote, freakshow, or your latest cause ... I'm not your background tune. I'm not the nutty story that your neighbor's been tellin' to you" (Hanna, et al.). As this song seems to, most grrrls blame the media, acting on behalf of capitalism and patriarchy, for the dissolution of Riot Grrrl. This perspective interprets the movement as a failure. Currently, however, there is a younger generation of grrrls using the internet as a means of community and production who understand Riot Grrrl as transcending space and time, and therefore still occurring, only evolving.

In 1996, when McDonnell wrote her article about Riot Grrrl's newfound "softer roar," she was referring to a pseudo-second wave of the movement. As she explains, "Important bands -- Bratmobile, Heavens to Betsy, Huggy Bear -- have broken up. Even Bikini Kill, the movement's best-known group, has distanced itself from the term [Riot

Grrrl]. Some early proponents now see it as a symbol of women's failure to take control of their lives” (McDonnell). It is true that beginning in the mid-1990s, Riot Grrrl became a dirty word for many of the movement’s original members, most of whom had moved on and started new bands by this point. Sara Marcus’ recent book, *Girls to the Front*, sheds light on some of the complications within the movement, between the grrrls themselves, but it is commonly accepted that the media was responsible for the dissipation of Riot Grrrl. Still, while it seems McDonnell is somewhat sympathetic to the grrrls distrust of the media when she states that “the title track of Bikini Kill's album, ‘Reject All American,’ explains why the band disdains the sort of media attention most groups would die for” as “Kathleen Hanna sings ... a sarcastic litany of ‘all American’ values that will earn her an executive position in an apocryphal company she calls ‘Nothing Incorporated,’” she sucker punches the movement with the following statement: “Riot Grrrl's rejection of the mass media at times smacks of college-girl elitism and stereotypically female fear of success” (McDonnell). To many, and perhaps McDonnell, Riot Grrrl ended years ago and was a failure in many ways.

Despite Riot Grrrl’s influence and some grrrls’ insistence that the movement thrives in an evolutionary state, the mainstream media’s interest in the movement has mostly waned since the mid-1990s. Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century the articles written about Riot Grrrl have appeared in less mainstream, feminist, and queer-friendly periodicals such as *Bust*, *Bitch*, and *Off Our Backs*. In 2002, for instance, Marisa Ragonese wrote a piece for *Off Our Backs* about her involvement in the group Riot Grrrl NYC and their then recent protest of a local radio station, K-Rock, for primarily playing music by male artists. Although these alternative sources do their best



to cover “current” Riot Grrrl events and individuals, the majority of the articles are concert reviews and announcements accompanied by interviews with musicians from Riot Grrrl’s so-called biggest bands (Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and Heavens to Betsy)—a sort of “Where are they now?” for the surviving movement’s grrrls.

The majority of the articles on Riot Grrrl in recent years are reviews and announcements of related books, such as Nadine Monem’s *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!* and Sara Marcus’ *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*. Aside from these reviews, a few articles have referenced Riot Grrrl. In 2006, for instance, Jessica Pressler wrote an article for the *New York Times* called, “Mama Was a Riot Grrrl? Then Pick Up a Guitar and Play,” which focuses on the so-called “kid-core” music scene that apparently is composed of pre-teens and teenagers. The only ties to Riot Grrrl in this piece, aside from the title, are the prominence of youth and a brief shout out from an interviewed sixth grader in a list of musical interests. Additionally, a *New York Times* article the following year on Dr. Martens—yes, the footwear—mentions so-called Riot Grrrl fashion:

While rude girls had been wearing Docs since the 1970s, it was not until the early '90s that women truly claimed them as their own. Riot-grrrl bands like Bikini Kill and their fans rejected high heels as "phallicizing" tools of the patriarchy. Instead they juxtaposed Dr. Martens' implicit symbolism of machismo and violence with torn baby-doll dresses, becoming at once the date-raped prom queen and her defiler. (Crawford)

As previously mentioned, riot grrrls rejected the idea of a singular, unifying definition of either the movement or themselves, including the concept of a dress code that implies

elitism and exclusion, and yet that is exactly what the media tries to do to them, even over a decade after the so-called end of the movement.

The most recent article on Riot Grrrl in the *New York Times* was published in June of 2011 in response to three events: the publication of Marcus' books, the recently opened Riot Grrrl Collection at New York University's Bobst Library, and a recent concert that was, essentially, a tribute to Kathleen Hanna. What is most interesting, however, is the fact that the *New York Times* had to publish a correction fourteen days later:

An article on June 5 about the riot grrrl musical movement and its legacy misidentified the original song containing the lyrics "boy girl revolution." It was "Her Jazz" by Huggy Bear, not one by Kathleen Hanna, who was in the band Bikini Kill. The article also misidentified the singer who first performed the song "I Wish I Was Him." It was an Australian musician, Ben Lee, not Ms. Hanna.  
(Ryzik)

Indeed, as is typical of any interaction between Riot Grrrl and the media, the movement is misrepresented, false information is provided, and Kathleen Hanna receives unwanted and undeserved credit. At least now, twenty years after the movement's conception, these mistakes are made with the best intentions.

## CHAPTER THREE

## “IT’S MINE, BUT IT DOESN’T BELONG TO ME:” RIOT GRRRL DEFINES ITSELF

Throughout the 1990s, Riot Grrrl DC and Riot Grrrl Olympia helped start a movement of angry grrrls across the United States. Their bands received a massive amount of attention from the media, most of which was negative as it belittled their music and talent in favor of dissecting and misrepresenting their purposes and ideologies. The texts that these grrrls produced and shared in order to spread their message(s), zines, often contained multiple Riot Grrrl manifestos—each composed of personal, individual definitions rather than declarations for the movement as a whole—which were often quoted out of context and mocked in mainstream periodicals. The popularity of a manifesto written by Kathleen Hanna, combined with the media’s claim that she was also the movement’s leader, led to many grrrls writing letters to Hanna inquiring, “What is Riot Grrrl?” In 1996, after a few years of touring and little involvement in Riot Grrrl groups, Hanna released a zine-style newsletter in order to answer several “frequently asked questions” about her and the movement as she understood it. Accompanied by handwritten and pasted texts exclaiming “We don’t need another hero” and “Power to the people,” Hanna explained: “I hardly want to be handing out the definitive word on something that has to do with a lot of different people. In my mind Riot Grrrl is whatever each girl/woman/lady makes it out to be thru her own ideas and involvement, so of course I can’t define it for you” (Hanna, “Official Newsletter”). This idea is repeated throughout many grrrl zines and manifestos. Riot Grrrl’s definition of itself, then, is heteroglossic

(Bakhtin), composed of multiple voices and contexts, and the best way to understand it is through experience.

In Riot Grrrl, “highly regarded roles” were fulfilled by the members of two bands who were typically referred to as the “foremothers” of Riot Grrrl (Polletta 143). One of these front-running bands, Bikini Kill, released six albums between the years 1992 and 1998, two of which were titled *Pussy Whipped* (1993) and *Reject All American* (1996) (“Bikini Kill”). The other most well known Riot Grrrl band, Bratmobile, released two albums with Kill Rock Stars during the movement (*Pottymouth* in 1992 and *The Real Janelle* in 1994) (“Bratmobile”), and two more with Lookout! Records when the band reformed nearly a decade later. Perhaps the least well-known bands credited as influencing the Riot Grrrl movement are Heavens to Betsy, who released one album with the Kill Rock Stars label, *Calculated* (1993) (“Heavens to Betsy”), and Excuse 17 with their 1995 album, *Such Friends are Dangerous* (“Excuse 17”). The band Huggy Bear (also with the Kill Rock Stars label) led the Riot Grrrl movement in the United Kingdom, which is generally considered separate for a number of reasons, particularly because of the co-ed band membership and call for a “boy-girl revolution” in the UK. Compilations and split LP (long playing) albums are still frequently released by Kill Rock Stars, and these were especially common during the movement and among the Riot Grrrl bands. These albums served multiple purposes, from introducing fans of one band to another, to creating their own community of Riot Grrrl musicians and producers.

All of the record labels associated with the Riot Grrrl revolution—Kill Rock Stars, Lookout! Records, and Chainsaw—are independent labels. The differences between independent and major labels, as far as business models go, may not be as

numerous as they once were since the internet has drastically changed media distribution, but an essential difference remains: “the way bands conceive of their careers” (Frere-Jones 1). For major labels, and their major artists, the goal is a major profit. Artists on independent labels, however, may still maintain control over music, the message, and aesthetics in order to produce that profit. Also, these labels occasionally “develop personalities as vivid as those of their artists, and in a few cases mean as much to their audience” (Frere-Jones 1). Kill Rock Stars, for example, was founded in 1991 by Slim Moon, a friend of Kathleen Hanna’s, and is now run by his wife. It has been, throughout its existence, “queer-positive, feminist, and artist-friendly,” and now is “one of the few female-run indie labels in the US” (“About Kill Rock Stars”). The Riot Grrrl bands chose independent labels, and specifically Kill Rock Stars, not only because of shared values, but also because with such a label they would be better able to diffuse their meaning to particular groups of likeminded individuals.

Another way that grrrls sought self-representation and autonomy was through the creation of zines, or non-commercial magazines. Although zines come in various styles and cover a wide range of subjects, they are typically low budget, featuring photocopied images paired with handwritten and/or typed text. As they are primarily a pre-personal computer medium, their production has declined significantly over the first decade of the twenty-first century, as blogs on the Internet have grown more commonplace. Throughout their history, “zines have been done by people already involved in a subculture—whether it’s science fiction or poetry or punk rock or whatever” (“Interview with Sarah Dyer” 169). Furthermore, Stephen Duncombe, author of *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, clarifies that they “are an

individualistic medium, ... [yet] their primary function is communication” as these self-produced and distributed periodicals “foster a community of losers within a society that celebrates winners” (Duncombe 48-49). Zines function as an alternative to mainstream media, and thus attempt to assert control over representation, which is a tactic adopted earlier by members of the Civil Rights movement and second wave feminism. Mary Celeste Kearney, who has written extensively on the Riot Grrrl movement over the past decade and a half, states:

With a belief that their groups’ viewpoints were either ignored or misrepresented by the media industries, members of these sociopolitical movements [in the 1960s and ‘70s] attempted to establish some control over popular culture and representational politics by independently producing their own forms of media.

(“Girl Power” 55)

It comes as no surprise that punk, which has historically been a scene that champions underdogs and seeks to disrupt the status quo, has adopted the zine as one of its artifacts.

During the 1980s, political “hardcore” punk was born in response to the Reagan administration. Prior to this decade, punk was more inclusive of different gender and sexual identities, but the subculture eventually grew to mirror the masculinity of the mainstream patriarchy. As this change took place, female punk rockers resisted the male-dominance and became zinesters in an effort to express and empower themselves. So-called “girl zines” and Riot Grrrl were not one and the same; however, the relationship is important as the latter came into existence through the pairing of girl zines and song lyrics. Sarah Dyer, a former zinester and the previous owner of many Riot Grrrl zines now collected at Duke University, claims that “Riot Grrrls got so much press and hype

that people thought that all girl zines were Riot Grrrl zines,” and she spent many years “[trying] to let people know that Riot Grrrl zines are part of a larger movement of girl zines, which are zines by girls which are specifically about being a girl and the ‘female experience’” (“Interview with Sarah Dyer” 168). In the essay, “Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from Within,” Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo claim that “zines subvert standard patriarchal mainstream media by critiquing society and the media without being censored and also give girls a safe place to say what they feel and believe” (811).

The first Riot Grrrl group spread from the nation’s capitol through zines and similarly styled flyers featuring dialectical pairings of obscenities and hand-drawn hearts and flowers (see fig. 1), inviting girls to a “fuckin riot” that seems like it might be followed by a “fuck hierarchies” slumber party. These pairings in the zines seek to not only incite a riot, a “soul revolution,” but to remind girls of that hair-braiding camaraderie of childhood. By alluding to the juvenile girls-against-boys mentality, the goal is to empower and ally girls (“go girl, GO!” and “check it out girlfriend!”) while simultaneously reducing girl-girl jealousy and competition by uniting against a common enemy (“boys”).

The words, “start a Fuckin riot” (see fig. 1), appear four times in the Sarah Dyer collection of Riot Grrrl zines at Duke University: once by Riot Grrrl Seattle, and three times by the original group, Riot Grrrl DC. Excluding one usage from Riot Grrrl DC, they are the same image reproduced rather than the copying, or quoting, of text: black rectangular backgrounds, white text, capitalized “f” beginning “Fuckin,” and solid black hearts separating the statement’s three syllabic pairs. Furthermore, the center word, “Fuckin,” appears to be handwritten, whereas “start a” and “riot” are typed. The fourth

appearance of this statement differs from the other three in style and the fact that a “g” appears at the end of “Fucking.” Although the text itself is typed, each letter’s font varies from the next, making the statement that consumes approximately one third of the page resemble a ransom note. The traditional purpose in composing a text in such a way is disguise, to conceal identity, but in Riot Grrrl’s case it was to further symbolize the movement’s heteroglossia and the text’s multiple grrrl authors. In *Persuasion and Social Movements*, Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton, Jr. explain that “[o]bscenity may ... demonstrate the user’s ‘sexual, social, and political liberation’ from a repressive, ‘parental establishment’” (175). Indeed, the zine authors certainly seemed to use rebellion to unite girls against patriarchy and gain momentum for the Riot Grrrl movement.

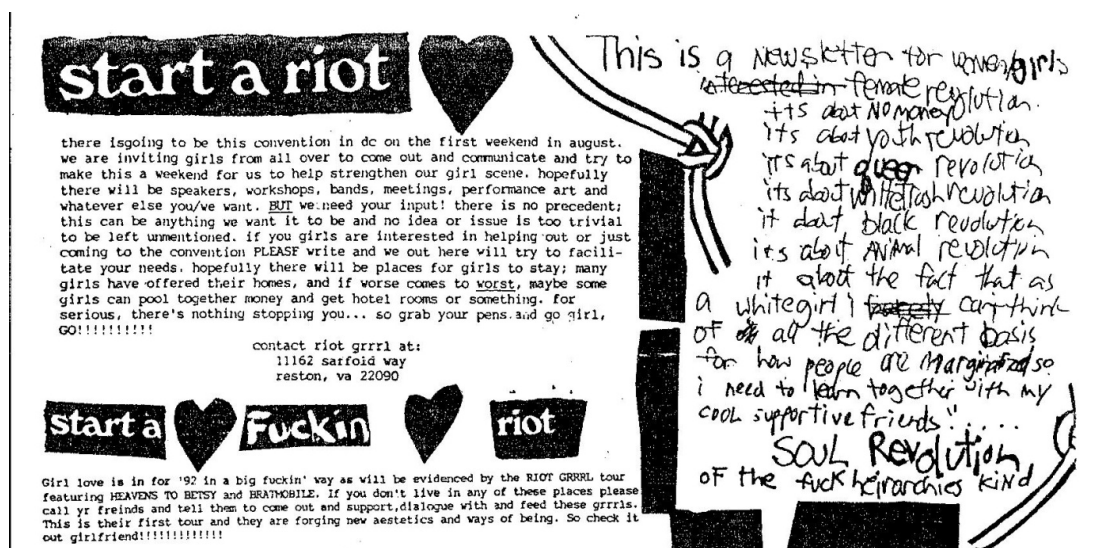


Fig. 1. Excerpt from Riot Grrrl DC, *Sarah Dyer Zine Collection*, David M. Rubenstein

*Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.*

What is most interesting about the use of obscenity is not that it merely marks the taking of a so-called “repressive, ‘parental establishment’” as an enemy, but instead the “liberation” from said establishment. By calling for a “Fuckin riot,” the grrrls were not



simply rebelling against patriarchy, but separating from it and claiming their autonomy. In one particular Riot Grrrl Olympia zine composed of over a dozen explanations of what the movement means, one grrrl writes, “I get angry and I was taught to keep my anger in or I’d be yelled at, not talked to, or hit, and I don’t like that and I need to talk about all of these things and I’m not the only one” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). This statement is composed boldly, relying on repetition of the first person singular personal pronoun to claim her anger, identify and reject society’s rules of appropriate female behavior, and report her needs as well as one of the many purposes of the Riot Grrrl movement. By embracing anger and making demands, the grrrls were no longer under patriarchal power—they had transcended it and built its opposition. To these grrrls, Riot Grrrl was freedom from the world that rejected them. In their weekly meetings “there [was] no hierarchy, no ‘rules’, [sic] no condescension, and no boys,” just liberation (“Riot Grrrl Zines”).

According to research conducted by Chaudhuri and Buck, “images tend to elicit more emotional responses while print messages tend to elicit more analytic responses” (Hill 30). Speaking of content and the writer’s experience rather than the effects on readers, the majority of the emotions found in these Riot Grrrl zines lie in the verbal texts, the “print messages,” and particularly in the handwritten sections. An example of this can be found in figure 1 in which one girl has written so quickly and emotionally that her message is full of mistakes and restarts (the words that are crossed out), while sometimes approaching illegibility. The handwritten passage in figure 1 is, essentially, a rant during which the author’s thoughts moved too quickly for her hand, and thus the mistakes and list format. On (hand)written language, Mitchell claims the following: “Writing, in its physical, graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the

verbal, the ‘imagetext’ incarnate” (95). It is entirely possible that this passage was marked out and styled as a performance, that the author functioned also as actor here—as Bikini Kill sings, “We are turning cursive letters into knives” (Hanna, et al., “Bloody Ice Cream”). Nevertheless, every sharp curve of a letter and quick horizontal cross-out line in this imagetext elicits feelings of excitement, suspense, and frustration, the sharing of a feeling and idea so intense that the right words either will not come or seem to not even exist.

The passage’s accompaniment by drawings of broken rope aids in the emotional reception of this imagetext, functioning as a metaphor for its power. By drawing a rope and knot that ends as it approaches the text on the top left and picks up again on the bottom right, it appears as if the author has broken restraints with her words. In his essay, “The Psychology of Visual Rhetoric,” Charles A. Hill posits that, “[i]n many persuasive appeals that use images, the images elicit emotions largely because these images instantiate one of these values, and evoking one of these cultural constructs causes the emotions that are linked to it to be instantiated” (35). Through the pairing of this rant-list of marginalized groups’ revolution(s) and the cut rope image—in addition to the black rectangles resembling bricks that lock in the unruly handwritten section—the reader experiences the change from societal confinement to hope for change and revolution felt by the author in the text’s construction.

Images and texts often assume a dialectical relationship in which “they contradict one another, oppose one another, and yet they also require, give life to, one another” (Mitchell 45). The solid black bricks and broken rope in figure 1 seem to contradict each other, as one represents oppression and the other freedom, and yet both enhance the

meaning and resonance of the text. In “Discourse in the Novel,” Mikhail Bakhtin examines the multi-voiced prose novel and posits that “the novelistic hybrid is *an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another*, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language” (Bakhtin 361). Whereas the “different languages” of the novel are the varied voices of the characters, narrator, and author, in multi-modal texts, such as zines, the languages include images as well. In this particular group of Riot Grrrl zines, additional languages include typed versus handwritten texts, single versus multiple authored passages, and quotes.

Furthermore, some of the Riot Grrrl zinesters provide their names at the ends of their texts, such as Sami and Ingrid of Riot Grrrl Vancouver, while others remain anonymous behind the Riot Grrrl movement/identity. The movement itself depended on both individual and coalesced identities and the maintenance of these various voices. Because of this, a multi-voiced text such as a zine where the various imagetexts contradict and yet complement in order to create a complex whole is the most appropriate and accurate way to represent the movement. As explained by one grrrl in a zine, “I usually have a problem with groups—I pride myself on being an individual. But, [sic] riot grrrl is a group of individuals therefor [sic] it is vital [sic]” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). Another grrrl addresses the typical male accusation of exclusivity in Riot Grrrl, noting that “this American society is centured [sic] around, by and for richstraightwhitemales,” and therefore “a collective of individuals” who are otherwise excluded from the mainstream is necessary (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). To borrow a term from theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, Riot

Grrrl's meaning was heteroglossic, and it is unlikely that many grrrls would have associated with the movement if this were not the case.

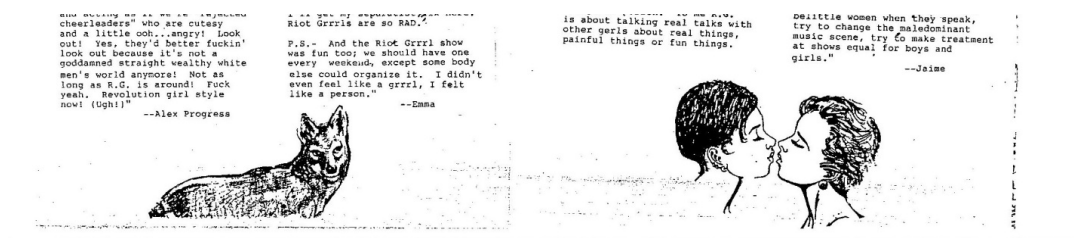


Fig. 2. Excerpt from Riot Grrrl NYC, *Sarah Dyer Zine Collection*, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

In the example of figure 2, the only images on the two pages—those “endow[ed] ... with a presence”—are those shown above: one wolf, and one couple kissing. These sketches are located at the bottom center of the joined pages, which consist of quotes from various grrrls answering the prompt, “What Riot Grrrl Means to Me.” According to Hill, many rhetorical concepts developed without images in mind may also be relevant to the study of the visual, such as Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s concept of “presence.” Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explain this idea as follows: “By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied. Indeed, such a choice endows these elements with a presence” (qtd. in Hill 28). Symbolically, the wolf represents “the contrast between the masculine and feminine nature” (Griffith), and, interestingly enough, the wolf sketch is juxtaposed against the image of what appears to be two women kissing, one of which (on the left) appears rather androgynous. Additionally, the zine was circulated circa 1992, which is also the original publication date of Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ feminist psychology text, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. If it is true that, as Bakhtin theorizes, “[e]ach word [or image] tastes of the context and contexts in

which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions” (Bakhtin 293), then the above images carry the “taste” of Estes’ text and the zine author’s intention is perhaps to equate the Riot Grrrls with those wild, mythic wolf-women.

The juxtaposition of two women kissing and a wolf implies a return to the natural where women unite and embrace their true emotions without inhibition—women are both loving, the text says, and ferocious. In various zines wherein grrrls attempt to define the Riot Grrrl movement for themselves, many also refer to their personal experiences at weekly meetings: “In riot grrl my anger and tears are understood and valid, & [sic] my opinions are worthy. riot grrl [sic] is where I reclaim myself. riot grrl [sic] is a hand to hold & [sic] a fist in his face” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). As opposed to in the outside world where grrrls were treated differently and held up to various expectations, in Riot Grrrl they were free to embrace their own identities and feelings, to be themselves. Some of the grrrls believed that true liberation from an oppressive, patriarchal society also required realizing that “we [women] really love each other and need to unlearn the hate & [sic] jealousy [we’ve] been force fed to feel for each other” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). Riot Grrrl was more than liberation and separation from an “oppressive ‘parental establishment,’” but a return to a wild existence, the very essence of being a woman.

Although parts of these texts may be interpreted as aligning with “difference feminism,” which views women as inherently in touch with nature and animals, some of the grrrl authors portray a different kind of “wildness” where they essentially abandon reality. Grrrl zines function as a performance much like other aspects and products of the

Riot Grrrl movement. One particular piece from Riot Grrrl Olympia is evidentiary of this wildness to the point of creating a fictional reality:

Riot Grrrl is a girl gang with secret plans to destroy Olympia. ... I am a tuff grrl [sic], sometimes .... this [sic] one night at a riot grrrl meeting some girls started talking about all these rapes that started happening at the college here. we [sic] got so mad at the total way the school and the media ignore sexual abuse and harassment. and [sic] how shitty it is to live in fear. so [sic] we made up a secret plan and carried it out that night. we [sic] laughed and held hands and ran around in the dark and we were the ones you should be looking out for. (“Riot Grrrl Zines”)

What is most interesting about this “unsigned page in a zine” claiming to provide various definitions of the Riot Grrrl movement is that it is “relating an event that nobody remembers having occurred” (Marcus 227). This particular piece uses fiction, creates a metaphorical event, to present the ideal wild behavior of women reclaiming their natural selves and relationships.



Fig. 3. Excerpt from Riot Grrrl DC, *Sarah Dyer Zine Collection*, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

The juxtaposition of an easily recognizable image in order to make connections between the content and the message of the text, the desired effect on the audience, is common in these Riot Grrrl zines. Janis L. Edwards, author of “Echoes of Camelot: How Images Construct Cultural Memory Through Rhetorical Framing,” states, “Familiar imagery is often employed to create metaphors or analogies that guide interpretation” (188). Starting from the top of figure 3 and working clockwise, the first image in this section of a Riot Grrrl DC zine appears to be three faces that are most likely female, but the photocopy quality makes them almost entirely unidentifiable. This image is one half of a row of six faces, and the other half of the complete image is located on a different part of this zine page. Although the original source of this image is unknown, it is repeated in a zine from Riot Grrrl NYC. This repetition, much like what occurred with “start a Fuckin riot” from figure 1, is what Gerard Genette refers to as intertextuality: “quoting (with or without quotation marks), plagiarism, allusion, and the perception by

the reader of the relationship of one work to another” (Helmets and Hill 14). More specifically, however, it is an example of hypertextuality, which “indicates a level of dependence between texts: Text B is unable to exist without Text A” (Helmets and Hill 14). In this case, the zine from Riot Grrrl NYC is unable to exist without the zine from the original chapter, Riot Grrrl DC (for figure 1, the Seattle zine’s usage of “start a Fuckin riot” is dependent on the statement’s creation by the DC grrrls).

Furthermore, Riot Grrrl zines’ inter- and hypertextuality lies not only in the construction and content of the texts, but also in the associations between the groups (DC and Olympia, for example) and the very movement with which they identify. A particular group’s credibility as a part of Riot Grrrl depended upon their knowledge of and conversation with Riot Grrrl DC, the origin of the term and movement. Because they were individual parts of a whole, however, these grrrls recognized the shifts in meaning not only within Riot Grrrl but also themselves: “Riot Grrrl is because I am a girl in process. ... it’s [sic] important for me to be in a group that’s also in process” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). The answer to “What is Riot Grrrl?” depends upon fluidity of meaning, a rejection of masculine linearity—a direct reference to the refusal of a singular definition by other grrrls across the United States.

Grrrl zines are also intertextual in their allusions to theorists such as Hélène Cixous. The language of a patriarchal society is inherently masculine and linear. In order for a woman to “write the [her] body,” she must employ feminine, circular language. One of the grrrls of Riot Grrrl Olympia writes, “I’m in riot grrrl cause i am a riot grrrl! [sic]” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). This statement has a double, circular meaning: she joined the movement because she *is* the movement, and she has assumed this identity because she



participates in the movement. There is, essentially, no separation between her individual self and Riot Grrrl. Another grrrl in the same zine explains, “There’s no copywrite [sic] on the name so if you are sitting ther [sic] reading this and you feel like you might be a riot grrrl then you probably are so call yourself one” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). Joining the movement did not require changing who you were, but rather experiencing an awakening and realizing your already Riot Grrrl self—the potential was there, it just needed to be named.

The term “diachronic” in linguistic studies refers to the development and change of language over time, but the term also applies to how we view and make meaning of images. Helmers and Hill explain how, in “diachronic viewings[,] ... we view an image that represents the past and was created in the past, but we also view contemporaneous images with a knowledge of their precursors and their previous meanings” (13), which is a concept very similar to Bakhtin’s heteroglossia. When we encounter an image, then, we construct its meaning from our past experiences with it, its creation, and its historical representations. The image of the dancing woman with the flower in her hand in figure 3, for instance, evokes the sentiment of the hippie culture of the 1960s and ‘70s. With her long hair, flower in hand, and patterned dress, this girl sends the message that Riot Grrrl, and this zine’s author(s) in particular, is about fairness, rights, and love, rather than (merely) the “manhate” that it and the feminist movement at large have often been accused of.

In her essay, Edwards explains how “cartoon imagery ... refers back to its earlier contexts and suggests future actions” (188). Although the cartoons she is referring to are, for example, the remediation of iconic photographs into cartoon form, which are not

found in any of the selected Riot Grrrl zines, her concept remains applicable. Also found in figure 3 are a Hello Kitty stamp, a sketch of a young girl walking, and the Venus symbol surrounding a fist. The last of these images is often referred to as the “woman power” symbol and may be found in radical and anarchist feminist texts. The use of this symbol is a direct reference to these feminists’ demonizing of patriarchy, defined as an oppressive system of involuntary hierarchical relationships. Furthermore, the juxtaposition within the symbol also calls to mind the grrrls’ preference for a return to women’s wild essence and dualistic nature.

Although the page’s images and text may appear to present “conflicting or competing layers of context” (Stroupe 253), with the juvenile Hello Kitty accompanying the radical, political Venus symbol, in actuality they assume dialectic relationships that are pertinent to the goals of Riot Grrrl and the zine’s author(s). Together the images represent the reclamation of not only the word “girl,” but also the innocence and absence of jealousy and competition associated with it and childhood in order to build a solid, unified force of female youth angry with the patriarchal society rather than each other.

An example of one of Peirce’s icons found in this collection of zines might be the image of Hello Kitty as seen in figure 3. The image of Hello Kitty, the popular Sanrio character that was born out of Japan in the 1970s, also appears in *Action Girl*, a zine/newsletter that Sarah Dyer authored in the early 1990s. In Dyer’s zine, Hello Kitty wears a shirt with “RIOT GRRRL” printed on it and holds a teddy bear wearing a black outfit featuring the anarchist symbol. Referring specifically to this image in *Action Girl*, Alison Piepmeier, author of *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*, explains that “this image captures the odd juxtapositions that came to define particular grrrl zine and

third wave aesthetic, an aesthetic that some referred to as ‘kinderwhore’ or ‘kitten with a whip’” (51). Piepmeier likens Hello Kitty’s changed meaning to the reclamation of words (“Slut,” “Whore,” “Rape,” and, of course, “Girl”) by the Riot Grrrl movement, as well as the girls’ penchant for contradiction. In a zine essay titled, “Jigsaw Youth,” Kathleen Hanna portrays the movement’s embracing of contradiction as a method of survival: “Because i [sic] live in a world that hates women and i [sic] am one ... who is struggling desperately [sic] not to hate myself and my best girlfriends, my whole life is constantly felt, by me, as a contradiction. In order for me to exist, i [sic] must believe that two contradictory things can exist in the same space” (qtd. in Piepmeier 87). Unlike Aristotle’s Principle of Non-Contradiction, which states that something cannot both apply and not apply at the same time and for the same thing, Jacques Derrida theorizes that within a text (or object) exists opposing forces. Viewing the grrrl as text, she is similarly contradictory by nature—existing within a patriarchal, misogynistic society while striving for girl-love and self-love.

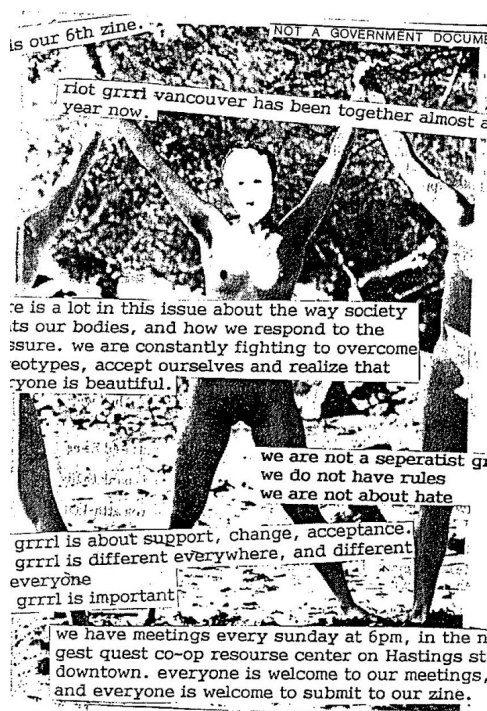


Fig. 4. Excerpt from Riot Grrrl Vancouver, *Sarah Dyer Zine Collection*, David M.

*Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.*

In Mitchell's *Picture Theory*, he describes "metapictures" as "pictures that show themselves in order to *know* themselves" (48). Although none of the images that appear in the Sarah Dyer Riot Grrrl zines necessarily qualify as "metapictures" the way Mitchell defines them, many of the zines included at least one image superimposed with text. The images themselves, however, are typically strong on their own. Perlmutter's "eleven characteristics of outrage-provoking photographs" include: prominence, frequency, profit, instantaneousness, fame of subjects, transposability, importance of events, metonymy, primordiality and/or cultural resonance, and striking composition (Edwards 185-188). Using the superimposed image-text in figure 4 as an example (although its provoked pathos is not necessarily "outrage"), most of these characteristics—such as "fame of subjects"—do not apply. However, the image of the nude woman outdoors

holding hands with others, as though forming a circle, suggests some “primordially” and “cultural resonance” in its reference to ancient polytheistic religious rituals as well as, rather simply, the original state of the human body. Its prominence can be found in its size and placement in the zine—that is, it takes up nearly an entire page towards the front of the periodical. The picture itself, then, is rhetorically effective for grrrls in its emotional appeal and cultural references.

Although referring specifically to abstract art, Mitchell also states, “A text is already inside the image, perhaps most deeply when they seem to be most completely absent, invisible, and inaudible” (98). The example of figure 4 is not exactly abstract art, but it is removed from its original context and altered—the face on the central figure has been masked (silenced), perhaps by Wite-Out. Without any knowledge of the photographer, subject, date, or purpose, the zine author can easily create a new context for the image and speak through it, giving it a new purpose, by superimposing text on the altered photograph. The text block in the center of the image, cutting through the central figure’s mid-section, explains how this particular zine issue focuses on body image, beauty, and stereotypes. Where the figure’s arms and legs link with others’, the text switches to the Riot Grrrl movement and chapter identities: it “[was] not a separatist group,” but it “[was] about support, change, acceptance” (“Riot Grrrl Vancouver”). Definitions are placed in blank spaces that cover portions of the background image, the low-quality copy of a photograph with women creating a sort of chain “XO” formation with their nude bodies. The text blocks become a part of the image in the zine’s edition of the photograph, and the combination, to borrow from Mitchell’s idea of “metapictures,” “show[s itself] in order to *know* [itself]” (48).

In the introduction to a section of essays on “Pictures and Power,” Mitchell explains “two intertwined traditions,” or “ways of thinking about the power of pictures,” called “illusionism” and “realism” (325). The Sarah Dyer Riot Grrrl zines provide examples of both traditions and use them to further their message(s) and movement. First, illusionism (“how things look”)—defined as “the capacity of pictures to deceive, delight, astonish, amaze, or otherwise take power over a beholder” (Mitchell 325)—can be found in the allusions that the Riot Grrrl zine authors make to hippie culture and Pagan rituals. Second, realism (“how things are”) is “the capacity of pictures to show the truth about things[, ... to offer] a transparent window onto reality, an embodiment of a socially authorized and credible ‘eyewitness’ perspective” (Mitchell 325). These traditions, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and what these Riot Grrrl zines do well is to combine them and add a third space that shows how things *should* or *could be*. While the images in the zines reference feelings of societal restraint, or the loss of girl camaraderie and innocence, they also provide hope of freedom and a return to a time of more unified girlhood.

Diana of Riot Grrrl Olympia claims “RiotGirl [sic] is about having voice—in the face of those who wish us to be silent” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). The movement was in direct opposition to the culture in which the grrrls came of age, one that defined “lady-like” behavior as knowing how to curtsy and speaking only when spoken to. However, Riot Grrrl rejected more than mainstream culture. Many grrrls in their Olympia zine entries explain the differences between their expectations of and experiences in weekly grrrl meetings. Their supposedly skewed ideas of the movement came from the biased and flawed articles published in periodicals such as *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*, but

also from individuals within their own punk community. As one grrrl complains, “even the minute portion of the population which professes to be ‘alternative’ and open-minded is just as ignorant as the rest of the world” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). Many grrrls, including Kathleen Hanna and other Riot Grrrl artists who were threatened and met with violence throughout the 1990s, were met with hostility from both males and females within punk who called them man-haters. Still, many grrrls continued to believe in the possibility of change and a brighter, less sexist and hostile future: “I expect the boys to get together and talk about sexism and to question their gender roles. Read a book. Then we can talk together (and we do) But [sic] not with girls as the educators” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). Although the movement’s goals and purposes were very pedagogical in nature, grrrls recognized the importance of taking responsibility for one’s own education and liberation. A large part of Riot Grrrl included exposing patriarchal oppression, but the grrrls also struggled to maintain feelings of hope through the images and references in their zines.

Although she resists identification as the leader of the Riot Grrrl movement, Kathleen Hanna “wrote the Riot Grrrl Manifesto for ... Bikini Kill's second zine, *girl power* which came out around 92” (Hanna, “Desperation”). The first line of Hanna’s manifesto (see Appendix) reads, “BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways [sic]” (Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). The capitalization of “us” and “we” sends a message that these creations, these texts and albums, were not for *you*—if they did not speak to you, did not move you, then you were excluded from our movement. The “you,” then, was anyone other than “us girls,” which included “beergutboyrock that tells us we

can't play our instruments" and "'authorities' who say our bands/zines/etc are the worst in the US" (Hanna, "Riot Grrrl Manifesto"). Stewart, Smith, and Denton explain that, "while some movements limit membership to those who can truly understand the plight of the victims, others do so because they see the excluded as the enemy" (72). For Riot Grrrl, "the enemy" was not only anyone perpetuating sexism—and "racism, able-bodiedism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, ... anti-semitism and heterosexism [sic]," as stated within the manifesto—but also anyone who criticized and opposed their actions and ideologies (Hanna, "Riot Grrrl Manifesto").

Much like "God terms" discussed by various rhetoricians, including Kenneth Burke, an ideograph "is a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal" (qtd. in Stewart, Smith, and Denton 280). Essentially, terms like "freedom" and "justice" are those for which many in the United States would willingly fight and give their lives, although those same individuals would most likely struggle to define them. A God term, then, is representative of a certain ideology, and a negative term that functions in very much the same way—"liberal," for example, which arguably has a negative connotation in contemporary U.S. politics—is a Devil term. Hanna's quasi-celebrity status throughout the movement forced her to assume a leadership role (at least for the media). It is possible that this manifesto was not written as any kind of official proclamation for Riot Grrrl as a whole, particularly since the movement urged grrrls to define Riot Grrrl for themselves, but instead simply meant to inspire others, and therefore it may be unfair to identify its God and Devil terms as belonging to Riot Grrrl and not solely Hanna, the author. However, her position within



the movement, albeit reluctant, adds this weight to her words and thus necessitates the extrapolation.

The ultimate God term found in Hanna's manifesto is "revolution" and its variations: "seek to create revolution in our own lives," "the coming angry grrrl rock revolution," "girls constitute a revolutionary soul force" (Hanna, "Riot Grrrl Manifesto"). When speaking to punk rockers and girls who feel oppressed and degraded by society, this is an extraordinarily effective choice. Considering this manifesto was included in a zine produced by the band Bikini Kill (of which Hanna was a member), its readership most likely included the band's fans, fellow riot grrrls and zine creators, and various members of the punk scene (particularly those residing in Washington, DC and Olympia, Washington). These readers would be easily inspired by any ideas and terms encouraging the "DISRUPT[ION of the] status quo" (Hanna, "Riot Grrrl Manifesto"). Furthermore, Hanna's "TRUEPUNKROCKSOULCRUSADERS" evokes similar sentiment in the readers by not only naming them as "true punk rock," as in "we represent what punk rock is really about," but also providing a pseudo-prophetic purpose (Hanna, "Riot Grrrl Manifesto"). Riot grrrls are not just talking about music and feminism, but fighting its own holy war on behalf of girls' souls—this is serious, this is necessary.

Other terms used throughout Hanna's manifesto that present themselves as quasi-God terms include "production" and "creation" (Hanna, "Riot Grrrl Manifesto"). The reclamation of "girl" by Riot Grrrl is an obvious meaning reversal—that is, taking a Devil term from society and making it a God term—and is addressed specifically in the manifesto when Hanna denounces the word's previous meanings of "dumb," "bad," and "weak." What are most interesting, however, are the Devil terms present in the piece. Not

necessarily name-calling, or verbal abuse, but instead defining the movement and the grrrls by what they are *not*. Capitalism is called out twice in the piece: once it is paired with Christianity (which Hanna leaves lowercase) and labeled “bullshit,” and the second time it is found in the following proclamation: “BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits of being cool according to traditional standards” (Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). In this statement we also find “(mainstream) media” as an implied Devil term, accompanied by others that are explicitly named: “profit,” “cool,” “traditional” (Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). The latter three terms combine to form the “status quo,” and Hanna even demonizes the word “reactionary.” In this piece (and, arguably, Riot Grrrl as a whole), “anger” becomes a God term and, with the numerous accompanying Devil terms, it seems Hanna’s purpose in creating and distributing this manifesto was to inspire grrrls to participate and produce their own texts by pissing them off, by inciting a creation riot.

It is worth noting that very few things are placed in quotation marks throughout the manifesto, and thus attention is drawn to them. Of the three, one is positive (“the punk rock ‘you can do anything’ idea”) and two are negative. One of the negative quotations, “reverse sexists,” is an accusation that was thrown at Riot Grrrl by male hecklers at the bands’ shows as well as some of the articles written about the movement (Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). The other negative quotation is “authorities,” which the manifesto says criticize the “bands/zines/etc” produced by the grrrls (Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). Once again it appears their enemy—that is, the one they can resist by producing their own music and texts, their own “moanings”—is the mainstream media

(Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). “Language creates reality,” and so long as the newspapers and magazines perpetuate sexism (and all the other “isms”), global change will not occur. When attacking an ideology so engrained in society that it goes unrecognized by the majority, it is difficult to name and attack the root of the problem. There is no centralized organization creating and sustaining sexism, its origin cannot be easily pinpointed, but riot grrrls recognized the media’s role in shaping consciousness. They recognized it in part because they too were media producers.

In the manifesto, and in Riot Grrrl as a whole, the mainstream media is demonized, but it is only a part of a much larger and (at least seemingly) ethereal problem. Hanna essentially calls for the overhaul of society—of Christianity, of capitalism, of patriarchy, and of the media that perpetuates all the “bullshit”—in her insurgent text. Stewart, Smith, and Denton define “insurgent,” a “typology of political argument,” as “typified by agreement on the corrupt, mendacious, and exploitative nature of societal norms, values, and institutions. The established order is vilified; specific individuals, institutions, and groups are held directly accountable for problems” (185-86). Furthermore, Hanna does not view the problem as easily fixed, nor is she willing to wait. Those same social movement theorists name the type of movement that Hanna is attempting to breathe life into as “Revolutionary Radicalism,” and define it as a movement that “sees societal institutions as ‘diseased and oppressive, traditional values dissembling and dishonest; and it proposes to supplant them with an infinitely more benign way of life’” (Stewart, Smith, and Denton 183). Composed during the Social Unrest stage of Riot Grrrl, Hanna’s manifesto functions as a declaration of an imminent “girl riot” against all that seeks to oppress young women: “Revolution Girl Style NOW!”

These zines and their images invite girls to an awakening, a “Fuckin riot,” where light is shed on the world: “how things look,” “how things are,” and how Riot Grrrl can change things one girl at a time. The images used, the texts with which they are paired, and the meanings created by the juxtapositions and superimpositions help create a vague understanding of the Riot Grrrl groups existing and producing zines circa 1992. What these zines do not provide, however, is a singular definition for the Riot Grrrl movement. These texts function much like individual pieces of a photo mosaic, declaring personal and individual meanings that combine to make a complex whole. Like the Riot Grrrl movement, however, these zines strive to unify, empower, and celebrate young women (“grrrls”), while simultaneously disrupting the status quo and resisting the patriarchy. These grrrls are individuals, they interact with and understand the movement in different ways, but they are united by their frustration and desires for sisterhood and change.

## CONCLUSION

The feminist-critic Camille Paglia argues that feminism is flawed because men and women are *not* equal, and that all feminism accomplishes is the creation of female victims. As a power relationship between genders is likely to always exist, there is some truth in Paglia's opinion; however, she seems to define feminism as the rejection, or ignoring, of difference despite common sense. Although this is arguably false for feminism as a whole, it is especially so for the third wave. In the introduction of *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, Rebecca Walker explains that third wave feminists have "grown up transgender, bisexual, interracial, and knowing and loving people who are racist, sexist, and otherwise afflicted," which means "the lines between Us and Them are often blurred, and as a result we find ourselves seeking to create identities that accommodate ambiguity and our multiple positionalities: including more than excluding, exploring more than defining, searching more than arriving" (Walker xxxiii). The third wave not only acknowledges contradictions and differences, but also embraces and celebrates them.

This idea of "exploring more than defining" is especially applicable to the Riot Grrrl movement (Walker xxxiii). Qualification as a Riot Grrrl was tricky to pinpoint: if she claimed it, then she was it. Definitions varied from person to person; therefore, one person might argue that another was not a Riot Grrrl because they had not, for example, *produced* anything (zines, music, performances, etc.), using the following grrrl manifesto as support: "riot grrrl is ... BECAUSE every time we pick up a pen, or an instrument, or get anything done, we are creating the revolution. We ARE the revolution" (qtd. in Leonard 143). It is impossible, however, to say whether or not an individual has

experienced a personal revolution. The words, “get *anything* (italics mine) done,” are vague enough to easily debate. Riot Grrrl existed on two levels of revolution, individual and social, and the latter was composed of the former. Lailah, a Riot Grrrl interviewed by Rosenberg, explains the meaning of “individual revolutions” further: “Change really has to be looked at on a personal level. The revolutions are revolutions from within. ... As long as they [grrrls] continue spreading their ideas, Riot Grrrl will continue to be effective” (qtd. in Rosenberg and Garofalo 841). According to this, the revolution transcends both time and space, and therefore it exists internally and externally, everywhere and nowhere, always and never.

Despite all of the differences and unknowns, in general these individual revolutions created and/or filled space in the grrrls’ lives. Lindsay, one of Rosenberg’s interviewees, speaks in past tense about how, “for the longest time[,] ... [she was] always the girlfriend. [She] just took up space” (qtd. in Rosenberg and Garofalo 840), but the revolution—a one hundred and eighty degree change, to combine a couple of the word’s meanings—altered her relation to space. For some, Riot Grrrl led to reevaluations of self-worth and subsequent adjustments to behavior. The moment of clarity for Aria was when she realized that her “own revolution could start with not believing some guy when he told [her that she] was worthless” (“Bikini Kill Archive”), and for Erin when she let herself grow “angry instead of taking it” (qtd. in Rosenberg and Garofalo 841). Similarly, Lauren claims she was “encouraged ... to make mistakes and to be fearless, to be a creator and to contribute” (“Bikini Kill Archive”), and another “Archive” post by Jaimes describes discovering Riot Grrrl as filling some unknown void, a blank space that was previously unnoticed: creating something out of nothing.

To be honest, however, “nothing” is not entirely accurate. The potential for revolution existed prior to the grrrls’ enlightenment. The term Riot Grrrl originated as the title of a zine, and many grrrls eagerly claimed it as part of their identities, but the media was ultimately responsible for labeling and broadcasting Riot Grrrl as the movement’s name. Essentially, the potential for naming the movement existed prior to the media procuring the term. In a Heavens to Betsy song titled, “Donating My Body to Science,” the grrrls sing, “If you dissect it, you can control it. If you can name it, then you can own it” (Sawyer and Tucker). The media named and defined Riot Grrrl as merely adolescent rebellion and young women as clumsy with their politics as with their guitars, and for a time these articles and the self-imposed blackout that followed dominated the grrrls’ safe spaces. However, the grrrls knew the truth of Riot Grrrl and held onto their faith that their texts, their music and zines, could speak for themselves and be enough to sustain and grow the movement.

Armed with various feminist theories and DIY practices, riot grrrls used their self-produced and distributed alternative media to combat the mainstream’s claims and judgments. Many articles on Riot Grrrl positioned punk as the movement’s patriarch and wrote about the movement’s inherited whiteness and socioeconomic limitations. Although many of the grrrls were white and middle class, focusing on these identities harmed the movement in a number of ways. First, it portrayed Riot Grrrl to outsiders as an exclusive club that one cannot gain entrance to unless they fit a particular profile. Second, it increased the invisibility of non-white grrrls in the movement, such as Mimi Nguyen, author of “the **evolution** of a **race riot** [sic]” (“Various Flyers”). She recognized Riot Grrrls’ conception as in response to the Mount Pleasant race riots of 1991 and

sought to transcend the boundaries of punk and Riot Grrrl “to piece together a collaborative zine using pieces of hearts, minds, skin, & blood collected from a loose network of colored punks, grrrls, geeks” (“Various Flyers”). Third, it trivialized many grrrls’ efforts to understand their race and class privileges and to “get to the root of this stuff and deconstruct it → [sic] decolonize [their] mind[s]” (“Riot Grrrl Zines”). These grrrls wanted change—demanded it, even—and recognized that the destabilization of the center begins with the individual and spirals outwards.

Inspiring a movement to become social, to move beyond individual revolutions, requires deviating from the norm to reach a broad audience. In a letter to Bratmobile’s Molly Neuman, a fellow grrrl writes, “radical feminist [M]ary [D]aly suggests revaulting as opposed to revolting, change spiraling upward rather than moving continually within the confines of a fixed circle. I think that for us to break out of the circle and into a spiral, to actually cause lasting change, we need to go beyond the obvious” (“Correspondence Filed Under H [2 of 2]”). Riot Grrrl employed shock value tactics—the use of obscenity, violence, and sexuality—to gain attention and participation, but it was the inclusion of the personal, emotional, and taboo—the “realness”—that empowered grrrls and terrified the media. Truly radical music that causes lasting change necessitates “developing a personal voice on your instrument which sheds the chameleon-like pseudo-universality of the competent orchestral interpreter—the musical equivalent of the polite dinner-party chatter which pretends to talk freely of anything, but remains scared witless by economic or sexual reality—and risks genuine expression” (Watson). The experiences narrated in Riot Grrrl’s music and zines were not universal, they were not every grrrl’s reality, but they were real and representative of many grrrls’ fears. Despite the movement’s supposed



death in the mid-1990s, Kill Rock Stars continues to sell Bikini Kill and Bratmobile albums and grrrls across the globe share zines and links to each other's blogs. After twenty years of Riot Grrrl's influence on popular culture, the music industry, and feminist activism, the original grrrls are now recognizing the power of their movement and the new generation of grrrls ready to learn, create, and riot.

Over the past year, Sara Marcus' book *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* was published, the Riot Grrrl Collection at New York University's Fales Library was opened to researchers, and a tribute concert was held in honor of Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna. Next year, Hanna and Bikini Kill bassist Kathi Wilcox release an album with their band, The Julie Ruin, and Sini Anderson finishes and releases her documentary on Hanna titled, *The Punk Singer*. In a recent NPR article, Sara Marcus comments on the current wave of Riot Grrrl-related events and productions:

[T]he coincidence may be a byproduct of what she calls 'the good old 20-year cycle' of nostalgia. However, she argues, revisiting the history of Riot Grrrl is no mere nostalgia trip — it's necessary to set the record straight. Marcus believes that most of the stories that have been told about Riot Grrrl over the past decade reflect only a fraction of the movement's real significance. (Smith, "Revolution Girl Style")

For many young girls, Riot Grrrl never disappeared completely. Grrrls have maintained communities through zines, blogs, and activist groups that may not take the "Riot Grrrl" name, but are certainly inspired by the movement and the grrrls who came before. What changed recently, however, are the original grrrls' attitudes towards the movement. For years they felt Riot Grrrl was ultimately a failure, and some of them have been consumed

by the negative responses they received to the work they were doing, but now they are willing to delve back into Riot Grrrl history and ideologies with the younger grrrl generations.

Zinestresses and members of Riot Grrrl-associated bands—such as Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and Excuse 17—donated documents and files to NYU’s Riot Grrrl collection, but as of July 2011, the entire collection was not yet available to researchers (Bikini Kill’s Tobi Vail, for example, had not yet granted the library permission). Simply scrolling through the finding aids, however, yields a multitude of invaluable zines and correspondence that give voices to the grrrls who were previously misrepresented and mocked. In the aforementioned NPR article, “Lisa Darms, head archivist of the Fales Library’s Riot Grrrl Collection,” claims her “goal is to create a permanent archive that will last hundreds of years” (Smith, “Revolution Girl Style”). Twenty year nostalgia or not, Darms believes Riot Grrrl is important enough to stick around indefinitely. Although the collection is still new and growing, Darms notes that it is receiving attention from both academics and adolescents and that “it’s very consistent with the ethos of the movement to have teenagers coming in and doing research” (qtd. in Smith, “Revolution Girl Style”).

Young women continue to be inspired by Riot Grrrl. According to the recent NPR article, a writer, musician, and activist named Amy Klein started a Riot Grrrl-inspired group called Permanent Wave in January of this year, and “[s]ince then the group has organized meetings and benefit shows and joined other groups in protests around New York City” (Smith, “Revolution Girl Style”). Many smaller Riot Grrrl-associated groups exist across the globe currently, but the largest community exists on the Internet. Twenty-

first century grrrls create blog spaces, like RaRaRiotGrrrl.com, to communicate with other grrrls, while others prefer to utilize sites and services such as Tumblr (“Fuck Yeah Riot-GRRRL”) and Twitter (“Riot Grrrl Online”).

Although many of the so-called original grrrls no longer identify with the movement, Riot Grrrl continues to influence women’s projects and careers. In “Doin’ It for the Ladies—Youth Feminism: Cultural Productions/Cultural Activism,” Jen Smith explains:

Riot Grrrl has evolved into broadly based activist communities. ... I have met a variety of women engaged in this kind of work. Some make music[,] ... write[,] ... run their own record labels[, and] ... keep track of all these efforts, producing directories for other women. ... Some are moms[,] ... gay[, and] ... old. ... All have known the threat of violence in their lives, all are resisting. ... All want to contribute their voices to a larger community of women. All are feminists. (237)

As new grrrls join the movement, original documents are collected and shared by university libraries like NYU, and women continue to create and make their voices heard, Riot Grrrl will continue to thrive, evolve, and inspire.

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## APPENDIX

## RIOT GRRRL MANIFESTO

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.

BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings.

BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo.

BECAUSE we recognize fantasies of Instant Macho Gun Revolution as impractical lies meant to keep us simply dreaming instead of becoming our dreams AND THUS seek to create revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit christian capitalist way of doing things.

BECAUSE we want and need to encourage and be encouraged in the face of all our own insecurities, in the face of beergutboyrock that tells us we can't play our instruments, in the face of "authorities" who say our bands/zines/etc are the worst in the US and

BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to falter under claims that we are reactionary "reverse sexists" AND NOT THE "TRUEPUNKROCKSOULCRUSADERS THAT WE KNOW we really are.

BECAUSE we know that life is much more than physical survival and are patently aware that the punk rock "you can do anything" idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours.

BECAUSE we are interested in creating non-heirarchical ways of being AND making music, friends, and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition + good/bad categorizations.

BECAUSE doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives.

BECAUSE we see fostering and supporting girl scenes and girl artists of all kinds as integral to this process.

BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits of being cool according to traditional standards.

BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to let our real and valid anger be diffused and/or turned against us via the internalization of sexism as witnessed in girl/girl jealousy and self-defeating girltype behaviors.

BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change the world for real.